NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

Issued Weekly. By subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second-class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office, by STREET & SMITH, *79-89 Seventh Ave., N. Y.*

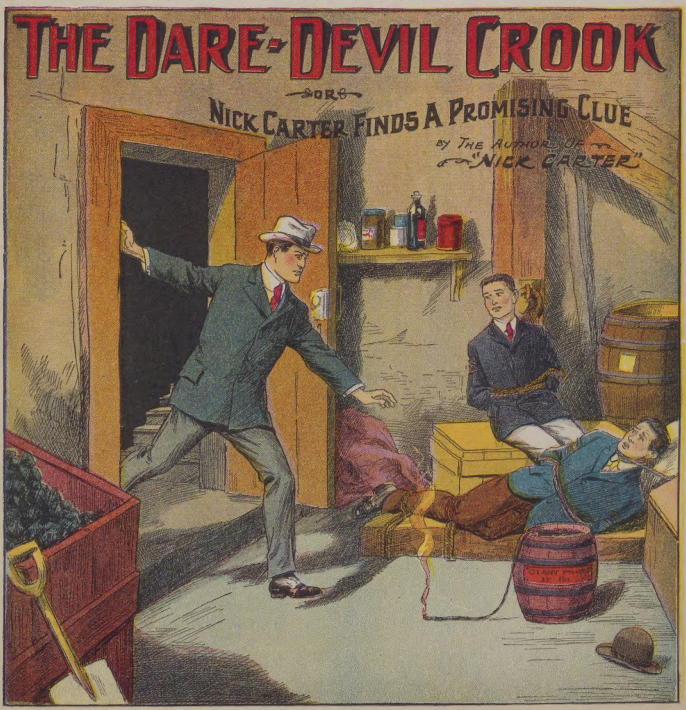
No. 552 NEW YORK, JULY 27, 1907. **Price, Five Cents**

THE DARE-DEVIL CROOK

OR

NICK CARTER FINDS A PROMISING CLUE

BY THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER"



With one leap Nick cleared the stairs and alighted on the floor of the cellar. There, sizzling along the floor like a crawling snake, was a thin stream of fire.

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

Issued Weekly. By subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second-class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office, by STREET & SMITH, *79-89 Seventh Avenue, N. Y. Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1907, in the Office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C.*

No. 552. NEW YORK, July 27, 1907. Price Five Cents.

The Dare-devil Crook

OR,

NICK CARTER FINDS A PROMISING CLUE.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

A DANGEROUS CRIMINAL AT LARGE.

Patsy entered rather unceremoniously the room where Nick Carter was seated reading the morning paper.

"I have a batch of news for you, chief," he said. "A whole bunch of it. I guess it means work for us in the immediate future, too."

The detective put aside his paper and looked up with a smile.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Sheeny Mike has escaped from the police-station where you left him last night. Loris Bentley—I mean Hermia Bolton's sister, you know; the one who was in the hospital—has been taken away from the hospital this morning and Hermia herself has been admitted to bail, and is even now at liberty."*

"That *is* rather a batch of news, Patsy," remarked the detective. "I hope that nothing has happened to set Ralph Bolton at liberty."

"Oh, no. He is fast enough. I don't think he will get away, unless those who have already escaped study out some means for setting him free".

"There's not much chance of that, my lad. But I don't see how those escapes need affect us. Loris Dent, Henry Horton's ward, is safe enough in the home of her guardian now. I don't think there will be any more plotting against *her*—and, anyhow, that other Loris, Hermia's sister, whom you say has disappeared from the hospital, never was a willing party to the plot in which she was expected to play the principal part. I think we won't pay any attention to the escape, Patsy."

"You forget, chief, the threat that Sheeny Mike made, when you arrested him."

"Oh, no, I do not. But I have heard so many threats in my time that I never think it worth while to listen to them any more."

"But you yourself said that Mike Sheehan is a different type of crook from most of them that we have to do with."

"So he is."

"I think you even said that he is a dangerous man."

"He can be a very dangerous man, if he chooses."

"And for that very reason, chief, he has got it in for

*Read Nos. 550 and 551 of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY for a complete history of the Boltons.

vou. I remember his threat, and the look that was in his eyes when he made it. I think he meant what he said."

Nick shrugged his shoulders and made no reply; and Patsy continued:

"Mike Sheehan—or Sheeny Mike, as he is called—has been a successful crook for a good many years. Until you nabbed him, the hand of the law had never fallen upon him, notwithstanding the fact that his reputation extends from ocean to ocean. But you not only arrested him, but this morning early he was taken to headquarters to have his picture made; and it was made."

"Good!" said the detective, laughing.

"The inspector told me that Mike was the maddest crook he ever saw when that picture was taken. He tried to avoid it in every way he could, but, of course, he did not succeed, and they got three very fair photographs of him. When it was all over, he turned to the inspector, and said to him:

"'You tell Nick Carter, when you see him, that I have got him to thank for this, and that I won't forget it. Tell him, also, that there aren't bolts and bars enough in the State of New York to keep me long behind them, and that when I get out I'm going to square accounts with him. I don't know how I'll do it; but I'll do it, and don't you forget it!' That is what he said to the inspector. Do you remember what it was that he said to you?"

"Something about a debit and credit account, wasn't it?" asked Nick.

"He said: 'I keep a credit and a debit account, Nick Carter, and I'm going to pay you off for this business, with compound interest.' Don't you remember?"

"Yes."

"Well, if you had noticed his eyes at the time he said it, you would have paid more attention, I'm thinking."

"I don't think so. Life is much too short, Patsy, to take note of all the threats that are made against me. As for Mike, I think he will value his liberty much too greatly to risk it by bothering me."

"And I think that his whole idea in making his escape was to revenge himself upon you."

"Nonsense, Patsy!"

"That is my opinion, all the same."

"Tell me how he got away."

"Nobody seems to know anything about it. He was taken to headquarters to have his picture made. After it was done he was turned into a room they use as a sort of a 'pen.' I had gone to court, as you know, to appear against him and make the charge, and he was taken directly from the court to the headquarters. From there he was to be taken around to the Tombs, but when they went to the pen to get him, he wasn't there, and nothing has been seen of him since."

"And they have no idea how he got away?"

"Only this: He is known to be an extraordinarily clever man with all kinds of locks. It is thought that when he was searched at the police-station, some tools for picking locks, that he had in his possession, must have been overlooked. That is the only way they can explain his disappearance. He was the only one in the pen when he was locked up in there, and when they went after him he was gone."

"Perhaps they forgot to lock him in when they put him there."

"Possibly. Anyhow, he was gone when they went after him."

"Well," said the detective, "I suppose we might as well sift it out a bit. You say that Hermia Bolton was admitted to bail this morning?"

"Yes."

"What time was that?"

"At about the same time that Mike Sheehan was making his escape from headquarters."

"And who went on the bond? That might be an interesting thing to know—later."

"A man by the name of John Hirsch. He looked like a pawnbroker."

"Probably a 'fence.' I suppose that Hermia walked out of the court in the company of her bondsman, eh?"

"Yes."

"Now, what time did Loris Bentley leave the hospital and who took her away from there?"

"As nearly as I can figure the time she was taken away from the hospital about an hour later. According to the people at the hospital, there were three persons who went there to get her; an elderly man and woman, and a physician. He called himself Doctor Treat, but I have telephoned to Treat, and it was not the Doctor Treat we know."

"Of course not."

"The man and woman gave their names as Bentley. They represented themselves as an uncle and aunt of the girl. The hospital authorities were reluctant to let her go, because she was yet far from recovery, from the effects of the blow she had received. But she was a paid patient, and there was no recourse for them but to let her relatives take her away."

The detective nodded.

"The supposed uncle and aunt represented that they lived in the country and that Loris would have the very best of care. Anyhow, they succeeded in taking her away."

Nick mused a moment.

"There isn't much doubt," he said presently, "that the supposed uncle and aunt were no others than Sheeny Mike and Hermia Bolton. The doctor was one of Mike's acquaintances, who was willing to help him, and to make use of Treat's name in doing it. There seems to be a concerted action about all this which looks as if

it were carefully planned beforehand; and yet, I don't know when they could have had an opportunity to do their planning."

"It must have been done in the very beginning," suggested Patsy.

"There is no doubt of that. It all goes to show that Sheeny Mike is a very careful man in what he does. Even where he had no reason to suspect arrest, he planned ahead what to do in case it should happen."

"As you have said, chief, he is a dangerous man."

"All the same, Patsy, I don't see as it is necessary that we should interest ourselves in this business. You were with me when we heard Loris Bentley scream and call for help from the window of that flat on Fourteenth Street. It was you who unearthed the secret of the plot between Ralph Bolton, his wife Hermia, and Sheeny Mike, for substituting Loris Bentley for Loris Dent—a plot which doubtless would have worked out all right if only Loris Bentley had been as dishonest as her sister would have made her.

"But their plotting and planning came to nothing, Patsy. We rounded up the lot of them,* and sent them to jail, while Loris Dent was permitted to come into New York from San Francisco and to go to the home of her guardian, Mr. Henry Horton, without injury."

Patsy shrugged his shoulders and nodded; but he made no remark.

"Therefore," continued the detective, "it would seem to me that our work is done. If the police chose to permit Sheeny Mike to escape, that is their lookout. If Hermia was admitted to bail, she will jump it, of course; but that is a matter for the district attorney; not for you or for me.

"And so far as Loris Bentley is concerned—we have no sort of claim upon her. She is, in all probability, now in charge of her sister, and while I admit that that sister is about as bad a woman as one could find in a long day's travel, I don't just see what right you or I would have to interfere, unless we are asked to do so."

"But Loris Bentley isn't in a condition to ask for help. You know that she was knocked galley west by that black-jack that Bolton hit her with; you know that when they stole her out of the flat while she was unconscious, it was Bolton or his wife who took her to the hospital—and they told me there, to-day, that she has not been right since."

"All the same, Patsy, I don't see that we have any right or any reason to interfere. We do not know a thing about Loris Bentley save what Black Bill Hurley, who is now dead, told you; and, for all we know, he may have lied, and Loris may be just as black a sheep as her sister."

"I don't believe it, though."

Nick shrugged his shoulders.

"To be quite frank with you, I don't, either," he admitted. "And still, we must not forget that this is not the first time we have had to do with that family. Black Madge, who was about as tough a proposition as we ever tackled, was a half-sister to these girls. Crime seems to have run in that family, and it isn't likely that Loris has escaped the contamination. I don't think we will make any moves in this matter unless we are asked to do so, Patsy."

"I should think, for your own satisfaction, you would want to round up Sheeny Mike," the assistant insisted; and Nick laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

"It won't be long now before Mike Sheehan will do something which will force us to look for him," he said. "Hitherto he has always worked in the dark and very much under cover, because he could walk the streets fearlessly and without recognition. But now, Patsy, that the mask has been torn aside; now that his picture has been taken by the police; now that he is known for what he is, I expect he will transform himself into one of the most dangerous criminals in the community right away. I think, Patsy, that it will be as well for us if we quietly await developments."

CHAPTER II.

SHEENY MIKE, THE HANDSOME CROOK.

"Developments" came about much more rapidly than the detective could possibly have anticipated. And they came in an entirely unexpected manner.

It was the middle of the forenoon following upon the conversation between the detective and Patsy, which has just been recorded, when Nick was called to the telephone. Henry Horton, the banker, was at the other end of the wire, and as soon as he was satisfied that it was Nick Carter to whom he was talking, he said:

"I wish you would come up here to see me, Carter, as soon as you can make it convenient to do so. I begin to think that I will never be rid of those people who are hounding me. I believed that they were all safely in prison, and I find now that they are all at liberty, and apparently more determined than ever to get my money away from me. I don't understand why I should constantly be made the victim of their machinations."

"What has happened now, Mr. Horton?" asked the detective.

"I would rather you would come up here and see me, than to talk about it over the telephone."

"All right. I will go to you at once."

When the detective arrived at the office of the trust company, on Fifth Avenue, he found Henry Horton alone in his private office awaiting him; and in silence the banker extended a letter to the detective, with the remark:

*See 551 of NICK CARTER WEEKLY, "Ralph Bolton's Double Plot."

"Read that, and then tell me what you think about it."

It was a typewritten letter which the banker handed to the detective. It was as follows:

"MR. HENRY HORTON: The writer of this letter is one who never turns back from the pursuit of an object once sought. The very pleasant little plot which was to have deprived you of a few of the dollars which you do not need, was spoiled by an accident—by the accident of Nick Carter's happening to walk through Fourteenth Street in the middle of the night, to be attracted to a certain flat by a woman who called for help. But for that accident, the plot against you, and incidentally against your ward, Miss Loris Dent, would have succeeded; you would now have had a stranger in your house under the belief that she was your ward, and the real Miss Dent would have been—who knows?

"But all those little plans fell through. Ralph Bolton, who engineered it in the beginning, is now in prison, charged with murder; but the others who were with him in the matter are at liberty—very much at liberty. One of those others is, of course, the writer of this letter; it does not matter which one, does it?

"The point of this communication is this: We had figured upon a safe margin of a million dollars, from you and from the fortune of your ward. We consider that that money was so nearly ours that we now have a claim upon it. This may astonish you, but if you will regard it for a moment from our standpoint, it will not; or, at least, it need not do so.

"We believe that we have a claim upon a million dollars from you; but we are willing to compromise. In a word, we will accept the sum of two hundred and fifty thousand dollars in cash from you, and agree to leave the country at once and never to trouble you again.

"If you agree, all that you need do will be to put a personal in the *Herald* as follows:

"'Mike. Your terms are accepted.'

"Now, if we see that personal in the *Herald*, we will write to you again and tell you exactly how to do the rest of it. If the personal does not appear to-morrow morning, we will proceed at once to 'collect' the entire million from you. *And we will get it, too.* You need not be told just now how we will proceed about that collection, but it will be in a manner that must accomplish the desired end in the shortest possible time.

"We are perfectly aware of the fact that you will send for Nick Carter the moment you have grasped the contents of this letter, and that you will show it to him. We think we can foresee just about what his advice will be concerning it, so we need not foreshadow it.

"But if there were a dozen Nick Carters, and you engaged all of them to assist you and to protect you in this matter, it would make no difference in the end. We will succeed, just the same. We will get the money, and if you prove obstreperous, or give us too much trouble, you will have to meet very unpleasant consequences.

"Perhaps you are wondering why *you* are selected for the victim. I will tell you:

"Twice now you have been almost in the net—*our* net. Once Bolton and his wife, Hermia, almost got away with a million and a half of yours, and just at the moment when everything was apparently all right, at the moment when success was an established fact, Nick Carter dropped down on the scene and spoiled it. Again, when we had everything fixed for robbing your bank of all that the vaults contained, and at the same time of imposing an impostor upon you in the place of your ward, so that we could gobble up her fortune, Nick Carter dropped down on the scene—this time through accident—and spoiled it.

"So, you see, our misfortunes have been your fault from the beginning, and *you have got to be made to pay for them.* That, my dear sir, is why you are the selected victim.

"That is all, Mr. Horton. If you value your life, your liberty, your happiness, and your fortune, *and if you value the safety of your ward*, you will put that personal in the *Herald* in the morning, as I have directed you to do. If it is not there, we will know that you refuse to treat with us, and we shall act accordingly. We need not sign our names, for you and Nick Carter will both know who we are."

And here the remarkable document came to an abrupt end.

"What do you think of it, Carter?" asked the banker.

"Well," replied the detective, smiling, "for cool audacity, I think it goes a little beyond anything in the form of a letter that I have ever read."

"I suppose it was that man, Sheeny Mike, who wrote the letter," continued Horton.

"Without a doubt."

"I wonder if he is fool enough to suppose that I would give up a quarter of a million dollars to him simply on his demand?" sputtered the banker.

"Oh, no; I don't think he ever had such an idea; not for a moment."

"Then why did he write the letter?"

"Some criminals are natural letter-writers," replied the detective. "They can no more avoid boasting than they can stop eating. Their egotism is the rock upon which that sort always splits. Mike Sheehan is one of them."

"Do you think that I should take those threats seriously, Carter?"

"I do—yes. Those two criminals mean you harm, but just what sort of harm it is now impossible to tell. I believe there was a deep purpose in this letter—a much deeper one than appears on the surface."

"How do you mean?"

"I scarcely know just what I mean. I can only gather

from it that they have decided what they will do and how they will move, and that they mean to move quickly."

"But how? What will they do? What can they do?"

"They can abduct your ward, for one thing. They might even abduct you."

"Huh! I'm not afraid of their abducting *me!*"

"Don't be too sure of that, Mr. Horton. This Sheeny Mike is a man who is dangerous. He is resourceful; he is educated; he is very little known to the police; I suspect that he is an adept at disguises, and I know that he is utterly fearless."

"Then what am I to do to protect myself and my ward from him?"

"I think it would be well if you were to engage at once a personal body-guard for yourself and another for Miss Dent—say two for each of you; and keep them near you until this thing blows over, or until I have Sheeny Mike safely behind the bars again."

"You will go after him now, won't you, Carter?"

"Certainly I will go after him. I'll get him, too; but I cannot say just how long it will take to do it, and in the meantime he might work a lot of harm."

"It seems like nonsense to go about with a body-guard, Carter."

"I know it does; but for the present it will be the safest way for you—and it will be decidedly safer for your ward."

"Well, will you attend to engaging them for me?"

"You had better do it yourself. I will give you an address which you can call up on the phone. Tell them what you want, and have them send you the men at once. Two of them should remain about the bank while you are here, and should go about with you whenever you are on the street; the other two should go at once to your house and act in the same capacity for Miss Dent. By the way, is she at home now? I think it might be well if I went up there to see her."

"She was going out somewhere this morning. I don't know where. But it is almost noon, now. She may have returned by this time."

"Call up the house on the telephone and find out if she is there, will you?"

The banker pulled the desk-telephone nearer to him and called for the desired number.

After a short conversation, of which the detective, of course, heard only the lesser half, the banker turned to Nick with a troubled expression on his face.

"I am almost afraid that something has happened already," he said slowly.

"I gathered that much from what little of the conversation I heard," replied the detective. "Tell me what was said, and who was talking."

"It was the butler who replied to me. He said that Loris went out about ten, and had not returned; but that about half an hour ago a messenger-boy came to the door and brought a letter addressed to me. Perkins says the envelope is addressed in Miss Dent's hand."

"Why didn't he send the boy down here with the letter?" asked Nick.

"He says he told the boy to bring it here, but that he said he had been told to leave it at the house in case I was not in. I told Perkins to bring it here to me at once. I wonder, Carter, if the blow has already fallen?"

The detective left his chair and crossed to the door.

"I don't think I will wait here for the arrival of the butler with that note," he said. "After you have read it, if you think it is anything that I should see at once, send Perkins to my house with it, and tell him to wait there till I return, if I don't happen to be in when he gets there."

"But, Carter——"

"Mr. Horton, those people are going to move swiftly. I can see that now. Whatever they intend to do will be done almost at once, and I wish to start my own end of the operations without any unnecessary delay. To sit here with you is only a waste of time."

"But I will see you again in the course of the day?"

"I presume so—yes."

"I will call you on the telephone, at closing-time; that is, at three, or thereabouts."

"Very well. I will try to be at home at that time."

"Suppose the note should be from Loris, to tell me that she has been kidnapped, and that a ransom is demanded for her?"

"We won't suppose things until they happen. If it is so, we will meet it when the time arrives to do so."

"And shall I telephone to this address, as you suggested, for the body-guard?"

"No; on second thought I will send Ten-Ichi to you. He will be worth any two others you could secure."

"I am quite sure of that. When will you send him?"

"Within an hour."

As Nick passed out of the bank he noticed a tall man who stood with his back toward him, apparently engaged in filling out a check at one of the raised desks; he noticed him because it occurred to him that there was something familiar about the shape of the shoulders and the poise of the man's head; but he devoted only a cursory glance toward him, and passed on out upon the street.

Had he followed the inclination of the moment, and looked a little closer at the man, he would have recognized no less a person than Sheeny Mike himself—Sheeny Mike, the handsome crook, who was only waiting for Nick Carter to leave the bank.

CHAPTER III.

THE ACT OF A DARE-DEVIL.

And now we will have to leave Nick Carter for just a little time in order to know just what happened at the bank after he had left it, for it all came to his knowledge later, and will have to be told here for the sake of the chronology of the story.

It was evident that the handsome, dare-devil crook had seen Nick Carter enter the trust company offices and had followed him into the building; also that he was waiting patiently for the detective to take his departure in order that he might interview the banker himself.

When the detective came out of the private office, Mike pretended to be busy at the side desk, making out a check, and in that way he not only kept his back toward Nick, but he succeeded in hunching up his shoulders and thus minimizing the chances of recognition. He had correctly surmised that the detective would bestow no more than a glance upon him.

But the instant that Nick had passed outside the door, Mike turned, and, with two quick strides, threw open the door of the private office, passed inside, and closed the door after him.

His entrance followed so suddenly upon the departure of the detective that Horton for an instant supposed it was he who had returned, and he wheeled his chair around sharply from the desk.

"Why, Carter——" he began, and stopped, for he found himself looking into the muzzle of an ugly looking pistol which was leveled steadily at his forehead; and behind that pistol stood a tall, handsome, perfectly attired man whose very expression warned the banker that he was not one to be trifled with.

"If you attempt to call for help, Mr. Horton," he said coolly, and in a perfectly natural tone, "it will be the last sound you will ever make. Am I to understand that you appreciate that fact?"

"Yes," replied Horton. "I won't call for help—yet."

"Not yet, eh? Well, we will take chances on what may occur later. So you thought that Carter had returned when I came into the room, eh?"

"Yes."

"I suppose you know who I am, don't you?"

"I might guess who you are—Sheeny Mike."

"Yes. My name is Mike Sheehan. I'm an Irishman; not a Hebrew. I suppose you received my very interesting letter, Mr. Horton?"

"Yes."

"I will ask you more about it after a moment; but first I want to give you a warning and also a bit of advice. I hope you will heed both."

"Under the muzzle of your revolver, I could do no less, Mr. Sheehan," replied the banker, with mock politeness.

"Good!" laughed the robber. "You have got nerve, and I like that. I suppose there is a loaded gun in that right-hand top drawer, isn't there?"

"Yes."

"Well, don't let your hand stray in that direction; it might be dangerous."

"Is that the warning and the advice you would give me?"

"Only part of it. The rest is this: I suppose that we are likely to be interrupted at any moment—that is, one of your clerks, or the cashier, is likely to walk in here to see you at any time; isn't that true?"

"Yes."

"Well, I am going to take that chair on the other side of you—at your right hand, as it were. I am going to sit down and light one of those very nice cigars of yours, which I see in a box, yonder. I'll ask you to light another one, too, so that we will appear to be very cozy together. Do you follow me?"

"I hear what you are saying, if that is what you mean."

"This chair which I have elected to occupy, is a Morris chair. It has a wide and comfortable arm upon which I can rest my right hand—so—in which I hold the pistol—so—and both of which I cover with this silk handkerchief—so. You observe?"

"I do."

"That arranges things so that the muzzle of the pistol is pointed at you all the time; but also so that the fact would never be suspected by any person who happened to enter the room. Are you still mindful of what I am saying?"

"Quite so."

"I have the reputation of being a desperate man, Mr. Horton."

"So I have been informed."

"What I say I will do, I generally do, and I never count the cost or the chances I have to take. You understand?"

"Yes."

"Very well. Now, if one or two or three persons should enter this room while we are seated here together, and you should make any attempt, no matter how slight, to betray me to them, or to call for help, or to let it be known that you are in a predicament, I will kill you dead that instant and take my chances on getting away afterward; and I haven't a doubt that I could do it. Have you got all that thoroughly through your cranium, sir?"

"I think so."

"Let me hope that you won't put me to the inconvenience of shooting you, for if you dare to disobey me in the slightest degree, *I will shoot you, Henry Horton.*"

"I believe you. I think you would not hesitate to do it."

"That's sensible. Now we will return to that letter

of mine. I suppose you showed it to the great and only living detective in the world, didn't you?"

"I showed it to Nick Carter."

"What did that eminent personage have to say about it?"

"He considered it a very remarkable document."

"Indeed! That was gracious of him. I suppose he was rather surprised that I should have written it; no?"

"No. He said that all criminals of your type were so stuck on themselves that they could not help writing letters."

"Bravo!" Sheehan threw back his head and laughed heartily, although he did not remove his eyes from the banker's face, nor did the hand under the silk handkerchief stir at all. "You had me there, didn't you? What did he advise you to do in regard to the letter?"

"I don't think that he gave me any advice at all about it."

"No? I should have thought he would suggest a bodyguard for you. I should have supposed he would offer you one of those great assistants of his, to guard you, and also your beautiful young ward, Miss Loris Dent. However, she won't need guarding. She is already in my power."

The banker half-started to his feet, but a sharp word of command from the robber at his elbow brought him down upon his chair again.

"None of that, Mr. Horton, *if* you please," said Sheehan warningly. "I really do not wish to shoot you, and I won't do it unless you compel me to do so. Hark! Some one is coming. Compose yourself, now, and sit quietly. Play the part that I have directed, or—remember!"

The door from the interior of the bank, behind the screens was opened, and one of the tellers came in; but he came to a halt when he saw that the president was not alone.

"What is it? What do you want?" asked Horton.

"Merely to ask you a question about the Cadawallader account, sir. It is overdrawn again."

"Protest the check, then, and return it. Notify him to withdraw his account entirely, whatever it is."

"Yes, sir."

The teller was turning away, when the president stopped him.

"Leave word outside, will you, that I am very busily engaged, and do not wish to be disturbed for the present, on any account."

"Now, that is the way to do it, Horton," said the robber genially, when the teller was gone. "However, I am going to ask you to recall that man, presently."

"What for?"

"To ask him to cash a check for you."

"To cash a check——!"

"Exactly. I am going to ask you now to draw a check, payable to yourself, for two hundred and fifty thousand dollars. Then you can send into the bank for the cash, which I will put in my pocket, after which I will take my leave."

"But I won't do any such thing."

"Oh, yes, you will. You don't know yet what I will persuade you to do."

"You won't persuade me to do that. I haven't that much of my own in the bank and——"

"My dear fellow, that doesn't make the slightest difference. The check would be cashed just the same, particularly if you sign it as president of the bank."

"But——"

"I wonder if you have forgotten something that I said to you a few moments ago."

"You have said so many things to me that I——"

"I was referring to Loris Dent."

Again the banker started wildly. He had forgotten that reference to her, for the moment.

"I said," continued the robber imperturbably, "that she is already in my power. Possibly you do not believe it."

"I could believe anything of you, you black-hearted——"

"That will about do for that sort of talk, Brother Horton. We are not here to call each other names, and I don't like the habit myself. You may call me Mike, if you like, or Mr. Sheehan, if you prefer it. And now, sir, you would oblige me if you would get busy about that money. You see, I have got to have it in my business. It is of vital importance."

"But I tell you that I will not——"

"Tut, tut, sir. It is a question of your money or your life. Which would you rather give up? And what is two hundred and fifty thousand dollars to you, anyhow? A mere bagatelle. And there is another thing to consider, my dear sir."

"What is that?"

"Consider the young lady—your ward. I presume you would like her to be set at liberty, so that she could return to your home to-night?"

"Certainly I would; but——"

"Were you about to say that you could not pay that much to have her returned safely? I hope you will change your mind about that. It wouldn't please you, would it, to have Loris Dent become the wife of Sheeny Mike?"

"Heaven forbid!"

"I am a bachelor and she is a maid. I think I know arguments whereby I could convince her of the wisdom of becoming Mrs. Sheehan. Do you wish me to make use of them?"

"No, no, no, no!"

"Then cough up the dough, Mr. Horton. If you keep me waiting any longer I will raise the ante to three

hundred thousand. Just now I am in the mood to take two hundred and fifty."

The banker was caught in a trap and he realized it. He had not a doubt that Loris was already in this man's power, as he said she was, for that telephonic message from his home assured him of that.

For a moment he thought deeply; and then, realizing that there was no help for it, and remembering that after all it was more than likely that Nick Carter would recover the money for him, he reached into a pigeonhole in his desk and drew out his check-book.

"Make it payable to yourself and endorse it yourself," cautioned Sheehan, as he saw the act; "and when you have drawn it, ring your bell and have it cashed, and as soon as we are alone together put the cash into my hands. When that is done I will pass through the door yonder and make myself scarce, and you are at liberty to follow just as soon as you please after that—for you won't catch me."

CHAPTER IV.

SHEENY MIKE TAKES BIG CHANCES.

The banker dipped his pen in the ink and then paused with it uplifted over the check.

"Sheehan," he said, "I have heard somewhere that there is honor even among thieves. Are you a man of your word, or do you pretend to be one?"

"I am when it suits my convenience to be so. It is usually easier to tell the truth than to lie—and it is less trouble. Why?"

"I want to know if you promise me, if I give you this money, that you will restore Loris Dent, unharmed, to her home this day."

"Oh, yes. You may take that for granted."

"Also, in your letter you said that if I would give you the two hundred and fifty thousand you would leave the country and trouble me no more. Does that go?"

For a moment Sheehan half-closed his eyes and peered sharply at the banker; then, with a cold sneer on his handsome face, he said:

"Look here, mister man, you are not making the terms to this compact; I am doing that. I don't want any more talk about it, either. I'll give you just three minutes to fill out that check and sign it."

"And if I refuse, what then?"

Sheehan started to his feet and his left hand shot forward and seized the banker by the throat.

For a moment he choked the man savagely; until Horton began to struggle feebly, as if he knew that he were helpless in the hands of this man; then he released him.

"Now, make out that check and sign it, or I'll kill you!" said Sheehan savagely; "and if you utter another word of protest, I'll bat you on the head with the butt of this gun. Get busy, now. My patience has given out."

The choking and the threatening attitude of the man who now stood directly behind him, had its effect upon the banker, and without more words he filled out the check for the required amount and signed it.

"Now, turn it over and endorse it," ordered the robber; and that was done.

"Now, ring your bell and send for the proper man to get you the cash for that check. When he comes tell him that you want no bills that are larger than thousand-dollar bills. Are you heeding what I say to you?"

"Yes."

"Then listen to this: While he is here I shall remain where I am now—behind you; and I shall keep my eyes on you all the time. At the first sign of treachery on your part, I will shoot both of you as I would a pair of rats, do you understand that?"

"Yes."

"Then send for the man, whoever he is."

"He will probably express surprise that I should draw so much money——"

"You may offer any explanation you please so long as it sounds reasonable to him; but beware of trying to convey to him anything that will put him on his guard. I will know it if you do, and not only your life, but his as well, will pay the forfeit. Now, ring."

A moment passed and then the same teller who had been in the room before, entered again; and Horton, leaning back in his chair, passed the check into his hand.

"Bring me the cash for that at once, Crosby," he said to him. "I want no bills larger than a thousand, for my friend here, who is to use it for me, must divide it into small amounts. Be as quick as you can, Crosby."

For just one moment the conduct of the teller was strange, and the suspicions of Sheehan were aroused; but the teller, who had gazed for a moment like one stupefied, suddenly recovered himself, and then he nodded his head vigorously.

"Very good, sir," he said quickly, taking the check in his hand. "I will attend to it at once, sir. It will require about ten minutes, I think, sir, to count the cash."

"All right. Lose no more time than is necessary. This gentleman must catch a train. And—er—Crosby!"

The teller was already turning away, but he stopped now.

"Yes, sir."

"There will be no necessity that you should say anything to the other clerks about the matter at present."

"No, sir. Certainly not, sir."

He was gone, and again the robber and the trust company president were alone together.

"Now," said Sheehan, approaching Horton menacingly, "I want to know what all that byplay was about in the beginning."

"What byplay? I don't understand you, Sheehan."

"Why did that man stop and stare for a moment, as if

you had called him—*ah! I know!* You thought you were smart, didn't you. Quick! What is that man's name? It isn't Crosby. I know that. I'm no fool. Jump to that door and call him back here if you care to live another minute! *Jump!*

He seized Horton by the collar and whirled him out of the chair, and thence around the room so that he sent him skidding toward the door through which the teller had passed into the bank.

"Call him back here before he gives the alarm, or I will kill you!" he said savagely.

Then Horton opened the door, but instead of calling out, as Sheehan had ordered him to do, he took desperate chances and made one mighty dive through it into the bank, shouting as he did so:

"Help! Police! Help!"

Sheehan did not shoot at him. He probably realized the futility of such an act; or at least he saw that the mere murder of Henry Horton could do him no good now.

Already the people in the bank were aroused; already they were running in every direction, and Sheehan knew, now that it was too late, that the name Crosby must have conveyed some sort of message to the teller.

It came to Sheehan then that Crosby must be the name of the gray-coated special officer whose place was in the corridor of the bank, and that the mere mention of that name had conveyed the proper warning to the teller that all was not as it should be.

In an instant—at almost the same instant that Horton leaped through the door into the bank, Sheehan sprang to the other door and drew it open, and as he did so he saw three men rushing toward him along the corridor.

Realizing instantly that nothing but cool nerve and consummate daring could get him out of the fix he was in, he started calmly forward toward them.

For an instant this act amazed them so that they hesitated, and then the officer, Crosby, started forward again, and it was evident that he meant to grapple with the tall stranger, if it should be necessary to do so.

But the tall stranger paused exactly in the middle of the passage and coolly raised his revolver.

"Stand aside and put up your hands, you three," he said. "I will kill the first man who tries to stop me."

Two of the men obeyed, but Crosby did not.

He rushed on, and he rushed upon his doom, for when Sheehan saw that nothing short of a bullet would stop him, he pulled the trigger as calmly as he had spoken.

It is a remarkable thing how quickly men who are not used to guns and gun play will hunt cover the instant a shot is fired.

That first shot cleared the way for Sheehan like magic.

Crosby went to the floor with a bullet in his leg, for Sheehan shot low, and the other two who had tried to stop him dodged in any direction they could go. Somebody from behind the steel screen fired a pistol at the robber, but the screen must have deflected the bullet, for it certainly did no execution.

And then, before anybody realized what had happened, the robber had passed out upon the street—or rather, upon the avenue—had leaped into an automobile that was standing at the curb, and was carried out of sight before those outside the bank knew that anybody had escaped.

But it so happened that another automobile was coming up the street at that moment—a big Peerless car, with two people in it; and those two people were Danny Maloney, seated under the wheel, and Ten-Ichi, Nick Carter's third assistant, sitting beside him.

It will be remembered that Nick had promised to send Ten-Ichi to stand guard over the banker, and now Danny was taking him to the trust company offices to begin his work.

They were almost a block away when Sheeny Mike ran out of the bank and leaped into the car, but they happened both to be looking at it at the moment, and they saw the haste he used; they saw also that several others rushed out after him and stood staring impotently in the direction taken by the automobile.

"Follow that car, Danny," said Ten-Ichi at once. "Something has been happening there at the bank. Keep that car in sight if you can do it."

"Oh, I can do it, right enough," was the reply.

"Get up close beside it if you can; pass it and give me a chance to get a look at the occupants. It wouldn't surprise me, Danny, if it were Sheeny Mike himself. It would be like his cool cheek to visit the banker in person."

The car ahead, which contained the robber, went swiftly up Fifth Avenue as far as Thirty-eighth Street; then it turned through to Sixth Avenue, going rather more slowly; at Sixth Avenue it turned southward again, still more slowly; at Thirty-sixth Street it went through to Broadway, behind the *Herald* building, and from there it turned southward again along Broadway—and it was just here that the Peerless pulled up alongside of it and passed it very slowly.

But there was absolutely nothing in the appearance of the occupants of the car to suggest that any of them could be the person who had left the trust company offices so precipitately.

Although Ten-Ichi had been almost a block distant at the time, he had seen that the person who left the bank was tall and dark and distinguished in appearance, and rather a young man at that; but here were two people in the tonneau, a middle-aged man and woman, with a negro chauffeur, and to all appearances merely persons who were out for an airing.

"Run up behind that truck and let them get past us again, Danny," said Ten-Ichi. "If that is the chap who came out of the bank, he has made a quick change all

right. I think we will keep them in sight until we find out where they are going, anyhow."

The car in which Sheeny Mike and his companions were seated continued down Broadway slowly—almost as if the occupants were trying to avoid the appearance of haste.

At Twenty-third Street it turned into Fifth Avenue, where the speed was somewhat increased, for it glided along swiftly until the Washington arch was reached. There it turned to the westward again and thence south, cutting around the corner of the park; thence west again on Fourth Street, and so on across Sixth Avenue where, at last, it entered upon that old part of New York which is known as Greenwich village.

There it skipped through Grove Street, turned into Charles, swept around a corner and presently swung through Bank Street and then into a small cul-de-sac known as Little Varick Street, where it came to a stop in front of a house which stood at the end of the little street, facing it, and which bore the number on the door, 13.

All this time Ten-Ichi and Danny had kept as close to the leading machine as they dared to do without danger of discovery; and even as it was, the young assistant was not sure that Sheeny Mike had not spotted him already.

But when the robber turned into Little Varick, Ten-Ichi directed Danny to run the Peerless up to the curb before they reached that street.

"Stop your engine, pull your plug and come with me," said Ten-Ichi then. "We must find out where they are going. I begin to think that we have struck a piece of luck this time, Danny."

CHAPTER V.

THE ABANDONED AUTOMOBILE.

And now one of those things which are inexplicable happened.

Nick Carter was just in the act of leaving his study to go out; he was going again to the trust company offices on Fifth Avenue to see Henry Horton, when he was summoned to the telephone.

"Hello," said a voice at the other end of the wire. "Is Mr. Carter there?"

"You are talking with Mr. Carter," replied the detective.

"Thank you. This is the garage of the Peerless Motor Car Company."

"Yes? Well, what do you want with me? I am in somewhat of a hurry just now."

"The boss directed me to call you up and tell you that one of our demonstrators has just come in and he reports that your car is standing, apparently deserted, in Bank Street, down in old Greenwich village. The boss thought that possibly you would like to be told about it."

"*My* car! Are you positive about that?" asked Nick, in some surprise.

"Yes. Rennie is the chauffeur who saw it. I think he worked for you for a while when you first got your car. Anyhow, he says that he knows your car as well as he knows his own face in a mirror, and he is sure about it—sure that it was your car he saw."

"Where did you say he saw it?"

"In Bank Street."

"But I can't imagine how it got there."

"Of course, sir, I don't know anything about that. Rennie said that children were climbing over the car, and it had the appearance of having been deserted for some time. He got out and looked it over. The plug had been removed."

"I am very much obliged to you," said the detective. "If you have an extra car there, and will send it around to me at once, we will go down and see what is the matter."

"All right, sir. I will come myself. I will be there in ten minutes."

While he awaited the arrival of the car, the detective puzzled his brain over what could have occurred to take Ten-Ichi and Danny to that part of the city. On the face of it he did not like the looks of it at all. Then he seized the receiver from the telephone again and called up the trust company.

"I want to speak to Mr. Horton at once," he said, as soon as he got a response. "I am Nick Carter."

"Mr. Horton has just now started for your home, sir," came the reply. "He should be there within five or ten minutes more."

Nick returned the receiver to the hook and went out upon the front steps to await the arrival of the automobile and also of the president of the trust company.

They arrived at about the same time, the banker reaching the steps just as the motor pulled up against the curb.

"Get into this car with me," said the detective to the banker before the latter could begin the tale he had to tell. "We can talk as we go, for I see you have something to tell me. I can't spare the time to listen just now, unless you will go with me, but I will not keep you very long—no longer than you would be here in the house with me. Now, Mr. Horton, what has happened? For I see very plainly that something has happened."

"Happened!" exclaimed the banker. "I should think something had happened. Do you know that Sheeny Mike was in the bank when you were there this morning? Do you know that you walked directly past him when you left the building, and that he had the cheek to walk directly into my office as soon as you had left it?"

"So," said the detective, half to himself, "the figure

that looked rather familiar as I passed out was Sheeny Mike after all, eh? Well, what happened, Horton?"

"He held me up at the point of a revolver, that's what happened. He compelled me to draw a check for a quarter of a million and to send out for the teller and direct him to bring me the cash for it; and only that I happened to think to call the teller by the name of Crosby—which is the name of our special officer—only that I happened to think of that, and so warn the teller—only that saved me."

"I see." Nick nodded approvingly. "That was a very wise thought on your part. He didn't get the cash after all, then?"

"No; but he made his escape; and in doing it he shot Crosby in the leg. He ran out of the front door of the bank and disappeared as if the earth had swallowed him. Nobody seemed to get even a glimpse of him after he passed through that door."

"How long ago was that?" asked the detective.

The banker told him, and for a moment after that Nick did some silent calculation.

"In all probability Sheehan had an automobile awaiting him," he said at last. "When he ran from the bank he must have jumped into the waiting car. That is the way he made his escape, without a doubt. Now, tell me this: Has Ten-Ichi been to the bank to see you yet?"

"No. I have seen nothing of him."

"Then that explains it," murmured the detective.

"Explains what?" asked the banker.

"I have just received a report over the telephone that my automobile has been abandoned and is now standing uncared for down in Bank Street. That is where we are bound now. I wish to make sure that it is my car that has been reported."

"Well, suppose it is—what then?"

"This: I figure, according to the time you give me, that Ten-Ichi must have arrived near the door of your bank at about the time Mike Sheehan was dashing out of it to make his escape. Ten-Ichi was doubtless too far away to do more than follow the man who was running away, and anyhow, he could not know what had happened. He might have guessed that the man was Sheehan, and have followed him on a chance. That is the only way in which I can account for two things that are at present inexplicable."

"What two things, Carter?"

"The fact that my car is abandoned in Bank Street, and also the fact that Ten-Ichi, who should have reported to you considerably more than two hours ago, has not been there at all. I know that he started to go directly to you. I know that he always carries out his orders to the letter, unless something of the most vital importance interferes with the fulfilment of them. There was something to draw Ten-Ichi off from his direct course, and only one thing could have done it."

"You think, then, that he saw Sheeny Mike enter that other automobile, and that he followed him?"

"That is the way it looks at present."

"But even so, why should your machine have been abandoned——"

"That is what I am going now to find out—if possible."

"Carter?"

"Yes."

"Here is that note that was sent to my house for me. Perkins brought it down to me, and I decided, in view of what had happened since I saw you, to take it to you myself. Before you read the note, I want to say that I have forgotten to tell you that Sheehan, while he was in my private office with me, boasted that Loris Dent was already in his power."

"He did, eh? I suspected it and feared it."

"He made all sorts of threats against her and against me if I did not give him that money. I almost wish now that I had done so, instead of giving the alarm and chasing him away without it."

"Why do you almost wish that, Horton?"

"Because he had already promised me that if I gave him the money he would send Loris home to me to-night, or rather to-day, unharmed. Now, Heaven only knows what will happen."

"Do you suppose for a moment, Horton, that Sheehan would have kept his word?"

"He said he would. I asked him that question."

"Well, he would not have kept it. He would only have laughed at you for your credulity."

"Do you really think so?"

"He would have sent you another note to-morrow or the day following in which he would have told you that on second thought he had decided to keep charge of Miss Dent until you decided to make the two hundred and fifty thousand a million—and I can tell you now that as long as he and his confederates can keep her safely in their power, they will not give her up until they have absorbed the greater amount of her fortune as well as yours."

"He threatened to force her to marry him. Carter, what shall I do?"

"There is only one thing to do, Mr. Horton—or rather two things."

"What are they? What are they?"

"We must rescue Loris as soon as possible, and we must get Sheeny Mike behind the bars—or under six feet of earth—without any delay. Now, if you will be quiet a moment, I will read this letter."

The banker nodded, and Nick removed the letter from the envelope. It was only a short note and had evident-

ly been written in great haste, and by direction of some person who had stood over her at the time. It was as follows:

"My Dear Guardian: I am compelled to write this letter. The words are not mine; they are dictated to me by that man who so nearly got me in his power once before, when he pretended that he was you.* He bids me write and say to you that he will not do anything to injure me in any way unless you force him to do so; but that he will not answer for my safety if you and Nick Carter crowd him too closely. He says also that you will have to pay a heavy ransom for me, and that he will find other means of letting you know how much and also when and how to make the payment.

"Loris Dent."

As the detective returned the letter to the envelope and placed them in his pocket, the car they were in drew around the corner into Bank Street and came to a stop beside Nick's machine, which was standing deserted against the curb, while a throng of wondering boys and girls were gathered around it observantly.

One glance assured the detective that it was indeed his own car, and he had no doubt now that he had been correct in his surmises: That Ten-Ichi had seen Sheehan leave the bank and had followed.

But the question now arose, where were Ten-Ichi and Danny?

Nick could understand why they had deserted the car for a few moments, perhaps to follow Sheehan on foot; but why had they not returned to the car later?

Obviously there was but one answer to that question, and it was because they had been prevented from doing so.

The natural supposition, of course, was that Sheeny Mike had discovered that he was followed; that he had purposely led those who were following him, into a trap—and therefore that the trap in which they had been caught could not be very far distant.

He got out and examined his own machine with great care and close scrutiny, but there was absolutely nothing about it to afford him the slightest clue as to what had become of Ten-Ichi and Danny. He turned then to one of the older boys who were watching the proceedings.

"My lad," he said, "can you tell me how long this car has been standing here?"

"Yes, sir. It's most two hours," was the quick reply.

"How do you know that?" asked Nick. "Did you see it when it came here?"

"Yes, sir. I was standing right over there"—he pointed across the street diagonally—"when the car came here, sir. There were two men in it; that is, they were young men, sir. They ran the car right up to where it is now and then they both jumped out and both ran around that corner there, into Little Varick Street. I didn't see no more of them because I was looking at the machine, sir. And I have been here ever since, and they haven't come back at all."

*See No. 551 of the Nick Carter Weekly.

CHAPTER VI.

NICK CARTER FINDS A PROMISING CLUE.

"Wasn't there another car ahead of this one, my lad?" asked the detective. "Didn't you see another automobile somewhere about here just before you saw this one?"

"Yes, sir. A big green car. That went around the corner into Little Varick before this one came. There were three people in that one."

"Is it there yet?" asked the detective.

"No, sir. It came out and went away a little while afterward. It went in that direction;" and he pointed with his grimy finger toward Sixth Avenue.

"How many people were in that other car when it went away from here, my lad?"

"Only one. The colored man who was running it."

"The same one who was running it when you first saw it?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you say that there were two other people in that car, besides the negro, when you saw it the first time?"

"Yes, sir."

"Can you describe them to me?"

"No, sir; only that it was a man and a woman."

"Were they old or young, do you think?"

"The man had gray whiskers. The woman wore a veil."

"I don't suppose it occurred to you to look around the corner into Little Varick to see where the other automobile stopped, did it?"

"No, sir; but there are only a few houses in that street, sir. It ain't really a street at all, sir, because there isn't any other end to it. I live there, in the first house around the corner."

"You do, eh? What is your name, my lad?"

"John Horn, sir."

"Very good, John. I am going to ask you to do something for me."

"Yes, sir. What is it?"

"I want you to go around to your own home, where you live, and ask your mother, or anybody who is there, if they saw that other automobile when it went into the street; and if they did see it, if they can tell us where it stopped; what house it visited."

"Yes, sir, I——"

"Wait a moment, John."

"Yes, sir."

"I suppose you know almost everybody in that street, don't you? That is, everybody who is living there?"

"Yes, sir; almost."

"Well, if the people at your own home did not see where the automobile stopped, perhaps somebody in one of the other houses did see it. Now, if you will go from house to house, asking that question, until you find out where it did stop, and if you will hasten back to me and let me know about it as soon as you have discovered, I will make you a present of five dollars."

"Gracious, mister!"

"But you must bear two things in mind while you are doing this for me."

"Yes, sir."

"You must not make inquiry at any house only those where you have known the people who live there a long time, and the other one is that you must not tell anybody why you wish to know about it."

"All right, sir. I understand. But I think I could make a good guess as to where the car stopped, without asking any questions."

"Could you? Well, let me hear you guess."

"I know the names of everybody in that street, sir, except the people who live in number thirteen. That's the house that is directly at the end of the street. It faces this way, and nobody has lived in it for a long time until yesterday or the day before, when somebody suddenly appeared there. The house was all furnished, you know; but it was locked up. The man who used to live there got into some kind of trouble and was sent to prison. And after that the house was closed and the others who had lived there with him went away. There ain't been nobody in that house since, until yesterday or the day before; but then I heard my mother tell my father that the 'hoodoo'—that's what they call it in the street, because it is number thirteen, and everybody who has lived in it has had bad luck—I heard my mother tell my father that somebody was living in the 'hoodoo.'"

The detective was thoughtful for a moment. Then he said:

"Wait a moment, John. I think I know a better way than to send you on that tour of inquiry. I will talk with you in just a moment." He turned then to the chauffeur who had brought him there.

"Have you an extra spark plug about you?" he asked.

"Sure. Two of them," was the reply.

"All right. Thank you. Now, Mr. Horton, can you operate a Peerless, do you think?"

"I guess so. Why?"

Nick drew the banker to one side and said to him in a low tone:

"I have an idea that we are standing at this moment within stone's throw of the place where Loris Dent is a prisoner, and where also Ten-Ichi and Danny have somehow fallen into the toils of Mike Sheehan. I've got a distinct hunch that they are all inside that house, numbered thirteen."

"Well?"

"I want you to take my car away from here, if you will. You can leave it at any garage you please, where it is most convenient for you. I would like you also to telephone to my house and to get Chick over the wire if you can. Tell him where you left me and that I wish him to disguise himself as an Italian and to meet me on this corner, as soon as he can get here after you deliver the message. If I am not here, he is to wait for me till I come. Will you do all that?"

"Yes; but——"

"Wait, Horton. It is very plain to me that Ten-Ichi spotted Sheehan when he was leaving your bank after attempting to rob you, and after shooting your special officer. It is also plain that Ten-Ichi and Danny followed Sheehan as far as this point, and that here for some reason they left the car while they went ahead on foot. It is also plain that they would have returned to the car long ago, had they not been detained against their wills—and accordingly it follows that they are at this moment prisoners."

"Well, I don't see——"

"You don't have to see, Horton. It is I who will do the seeing for all of us for the present. But one thing is certain."

"What is that?"

"I am reasonably sure that Ten-Ichi and Danny are somewhere in that street yet. They were seen to enter it and they were not seen to leave it again. If they had come out of it, they would have taken this car away. If Sheehan is there and he has taken them prisoner, it is reasonable to suppose that Loris Dent is a prisoner at the same place."

"I suppose so."

"And I remain behind here, for the reason that I don't want to leave the end of this short street—the only end it has got—unguarded for a moment. If I turned my back on it now for fifteen minutes, I could no longer feel sure that our friends were there."

"What am I to do with myself while you are here, Carter?"

"I think you had better go home and stay there until you hear from me. Let another take your place at the bank to-morrow, and you remain at home."

"All right. I will do that."

"And don't forget the details of that message to Chick."

"I will remember."

"You may take Patsy home with you, if you like, as a body-guard, for if I don't round up Mike Sheehan before another day, he will make strenuous efforts to get at you; you may be certain of that. I will telephone you as soon as there is anything to report."

Five minutes later Nick Carter and young John Horn, his new acquaintance, stood alone on the curb together, watching the two automobiles as they swung around a

corner and disappeared. Then, with a smile in his eyes, the detective turned to the lad.

"John," he said, "can you keep a secret?"

"I think so, sir."

"Did you ever hear of Nick Carter, John?"

"Of Nick *Carter?* I should say I had. *Why?*"

"Because I am Nick Carter, John, and I want you to help me. Will you?"

"For a moment John Horn stared at Nick with wide eyes and open mouth; but slowly the truth of what he had heard dawned upon him.

"Do you mean it, sir? Is that on the level?" he asked. "You ain't joshing me, are you?"

"No, John; I am in earnest."

"I wonder if you'd shake hands with me, sir? Would you?" asked John.

"Certainly, my lad. There is my hand. Shake it for all you are worth; and now, will you do something to help me, John?"

"You just bet I will, sir! What is it?"

"I want you to stand on the corner there and watch the street for me, while I am absent. I will be gone only a few minutes, but there are some things around the corner, in a second-hand clothing-store, that I want to get. Will you stand guard for me while I am gone?"

"Yes, sir. Indeed I will, sir."

"Stand where you can keep the door of number thirteen in view all the time. If you see anybody at all come out of that house before I get back, I want you to follow whoever it is, and as you go along, tear little pieces off of this newspaper and drop them along the pavement. I will be absent so short a time that you will not have gone far before I return. Do you think you can do all that, John?"

"Yes, siree!"

"I don't think it likely that anybody will come out before I get back. I don't think the people who live there care to show themselves too much in daylight. However, it is as well to have you on the watch."

"All right, sir; I'll watch. Are you going to get a disguise, sir? Is that why you asked for the second-hand clothing-store?"

"Yes."

"Well, sir, if you will just buy what you want and come right back here, I can take you into my home, for you to dress. Then you won't have to be away so long a time."

"That is a happy thought, John. I'll do that."

"And maybe, sir, you will let me see you when you are disguising yourself?" the boy asked wistfully.

"Of course I will."

"Can I ask just one more question, sir?"

"When I return. You may ask all the questions you like then, John."

"I only wanted to ask if those people you are after are murderers?"

The detective laughed.

"Not exactly that, John," he said, "although they are about as bad as they make them. But all crooks are not murderers, my lad. Get to the corner now, and keep close watch of Little Varick Street, as I told you to do. Just keep your eye on the door of that particular house."

"I'll do that, sir, never fear."

"I won't be gone more than ten minutes. I ought to be able to procure all I want in that time, and then you shall take me into your house to dress. Oh, I forgot! Here is that five dollars I was going to give you. If you are faithful, you will earn more before we part."

"Thank you, sir."

CHAPTER VII.

THE HOUSE AT THE END OF THE STREET.

Nothing happened while the detective was absent.

The short street, made like a pocket in a garment, remained as quiet and deserted as if nobody lived in it at all, and John Horn so reported when Nick Carter returned.

"All right," said the detective; "and now, John, take me to your house, where I can put on the disguise I have here. We must go into a front room, where we can keep watch of the street while I am making the change."

The boy led the way swiftly to his home, and in a very few minutes Nick found himself in a large front room on the second floor, where there was a bay window from which he could command a view of the entire street; and while John Horn went to apprise his mother of what had happened, the detective undid the package he had brought with him.

While John was still absent, the detective changed the clothing he was wearing for that which he had purchased, and as he was never without a small make-up box in his possession, he arranged a small mirror in the bay window, and was already busily engaged in making up his face when the boy came back.

And young John Horn seated himself in a chair where he could watch every motion that his ideal man made, and he stared at the detective with undisguised worship in his brown eyes.

Little by little the outward appearance of the detective underwent a change.

He darkened his skin until it became of an olive tint; he fixed a small, downy mustache to his upper lip and a little tuft of hair to the lower lip. From one of the pockets of the clothes he had removed he procured a wig of straight black hair, and upon this he set a cap jauntily.

Then he darkened his hands and wrists, and in less than fifteen minutes from the time he began, he stood there before the astounded John Horn, a typical Italian

laborer—but, withal, one who has been a little bit successful.

Young Horn was in rapture.

He clapped his hands together in a sort of ecstasy, as he exclaimed:

"It is wonderful, sir. I never would have known you in the world if I hadn't seen you do it right before my eyes. It is wonderful!"

The afternoon was waning rapidly by this time, and Nick realized that in less than two hours more it would be quite dark. He sincerely hoped that Chick would be there before that time.

There was one thing about the conduct of Sheeny Mike—if, indeed, it was Sheeny Mike who occupied No. 13—which gave him a bit of uneasiness; and that was the fact that the big Peerless, abandoned by Ten-Ichi and Danny, had been allowed to remain where it was.

Sheehan was too wise a man not to know that, sooner or later, the machine would be reported, and that Nick Carter was bound to learn where it had been found. Nick could not understand why Sheeny Mike had not made some effort to remove it to another place.

"Now, John," said the detective, when he was prepared for the street, "do you want to go outside with me and sit on the front steps for a while?"

"Yes, sir."

"We will just sit down on the lowest step and talk. Then I can keep watch of the house; but when it gets dark I want you to come back inside the house, and not try to see any more. It is possible that there may be danger out there."

"I'm not afraid of danger, sir."

"I don't suppose you are. You are a very brave lad for fourteen years old. However, if you really wish to help me, you can be of more help by remaining inside the house after it is dark than you could in any other way. Is that understood?"

"Yes, sir. Will you tell me what you are going to do?"

"I don't know that myself, as yet—but I shall probably find a way to get inside of that house at the end of the street before morning. Now, you must not tell that to anybody."

"Certainly not, sir."

They had been seated on the steps of the house for some time, when Nick perceived that Chick had arrived at the corner, and was standing there, evidently awaiting some sign from his chief; and, with a touch of the spirit of mischief, the detective said to young Horn:

"John, have you heard about Chick, too?"

"Yes, indeed I have, sir."

"Well, do you see that Italian-looking chap standing there on the corner?"

"Yes, sir."

"That is Chick. I sent for him, to disguise himself as an Italian and to wait for me on that corner. Now, would you like to have a little fun at his expense?"

"If he won't be angry about it."

"Oh, I guess not."

"What am I to do, sir?"

"I will remain here, out of sight from him, while you walk to the corner. Stop there and look at him a moment, and then say: 'Hello, Chick?'"

"Maybe he won't like it."

"Oh, we'll risk that. Perhaps he won't take any notice of you at all. If he does not, then you are to say: 'Are you looking for Sheeny Mike and his gang?' Only you must say it in a low tone."

"What will he do then?"

"Well, that is hard to say; but he will do something; but you can tell him, after that, that there is another dago waiting for him down here on the steps. Then bring him here to me."

"All right, sir."

There was a quiet smile on the detective's face as he watched the lad approach his assistant; and he could see the sudden start that Chick gave when he heard his own name called aloud by the brown-eyed lad. However, as Nick had supposed would be the case, he paid no attention to it.

After a moment of pause, Nick could see the lad step still nearer to Chick and say something to him—doubtless the question the detective had told him to ask; and then he chuckled as Chick turned suddenly and seized the boy in his arms; and this is what Chick was saying:

"Whata for you calla me names, ha? You spika da truth an' tella who senta you here, ha?"

A moment later Nick saw his assistant lift the boy tenderly upon his shoulder and start with him down the street toward the spot where the detective was seated; and then, to the utter dismay of John Horn, the two began to converse rapidly in the Italian language.

As concisely as possible, Nick told his assistant all that had happened, and upon what he based his belief that No. 13 on that street contained at that moment the people for whom they were searching.

"I haven't a doubt in my mind," he said, "that Loris Dent is there, as well as Ten-Ichi and Danny. It is probably one of the places Mike Sheehan keeps, where he can hide himself away from the law for a while when it becomes advisable to do so."

"That is the way it looks to me," assented Chick.

"Chick, how will it seem to burglarize a burglar's house, eh?"

"Is that what you intend to do?"

"That is what I have in mind. I think if we keep watch here until the wee, small hours of the morning—until we are reasonably sure that the people in that house have retired, we will have a good opportunity to enter it as slickly as we could any house."

Chick chuckled.

"It will be rather funny, won't it?" he asked.

Nick nodded.

"To enter the house of a professional cracksman. But I'll tell you one thing, Nick."

"Well?"

"If we should happen to rouse Sheehan, we'll have the fight of our lives on our hands. It seems to me that it wouldn't be a bad idea if we had more help with us."

"You forget that we have two to help us who are already inside the house," said the detective. "We have only to find Ten-Ichi and Danny, and set them at liberty, and we will be four, instead of two. Hello! Here comes somebody, Chick, just turned into the street from the corner. John, do you know that man who is coming this way?"

"No, sir. He is a stranger around here."

"Keep on talking dago, Chick. If he is bound for No. 13, he'll have a sharp eye on us when he is passing."

But the man who approached and then passed them seemed not to see them at all, or, if he did, he took no notice whatever of them. Nevertheless, he continued rapidly down the street to the house at the end of it—to No. 13—and there, apparently without the necessity of ringing the bell, the door was opened to receive him, and he passed inside and out of sight.

"That looks as if somebody was keeping watch from inside the shutters," said the detective.

"Decidedly so," agreed Chick. "Here comes another one, Nick."

A second man had turned into the street, and rapidly approached the house at the end of it; and this second comer was admitted in the same manner that the first had been.

And then, within the next half-hour—that is, until it was quite dark—three more men came into the street, passed quietly and rapidly through it, and were mysteriously admitted to the house at the end of the street.

When it was apparent that no more were coming, at least at present, Chick shrugged his shoulders and said to his chief:

"It begins to look as if we will be up against quite a bunch of them when we break into that house."

"It does, for a fact," assented the detective.

"What do you make of it all?" asked Chick.

"I make it that Sheehan is beginning the organization of a regular gang of crooks," replied Nick. "You see, Chick, that always, until we tore the mask aside, Sheehan has been able to prey upon society by night and walk unnoticed among men by day, and as long as he could do that—as long as he was known only by reputation, and not at all by his features—he preferred to work entirely alone.

"But now all that is in the past. Now his picture is in the Rogues' Gallery; now his face is known to the police; now he is a marked man, and, doubtless, he realizes that if he is to make his pile and get away with it without getting caught, he must do it quickly."

"I understand," said Chick.

"It would, I think, be like him to try the organization of a regular gang, and if he did a thing like that, he would make his men do all the really dangerous work, while he remained behind and did the planning, and, incidentally, reaped most of the profits. I believe, Chick, that he and Hermia are organizinz a gang, and that the men we have seen enter that house are the nucleus of it. Anyhow, we will find out a little bit later."

"You still intend to enter the house, do you?" asked Chick.

"More than ever I intend to do it. We will make the attempt a little earlier than I intended to do it at first, too."

"Why?"

"Because, once that gang is together, they will make a night of it. When they get through talking and making their plans, they will play cards probably till morning. If we wait till the 'burglars' hour'—two o'clock—they will be twice as apt to hear us as they will if we break in early in the evening."

"What is your plan for getting inside, Nick?"

"I am going to get our young friend here to pass us to the road, through his house, and we will try the scuttle. I think it will be the safest and easiest; the way from which interruption will be least expected, and the way that will afford us the best opportunity to search for prisoners who may be confined there."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RESCUE OF LORIS DENT.

It was only eleven o'clock when the detective decided that it was safe to begin operations. Already that small street—if it could really be called a street—was dark and quiet; already the people who lived there had retired for the night.

Even the house at the end of the street was dark and silent; but the detectives knew that this was only the outward appearance. Beyond and behind drawn curtains which were sufficiently thick and heavy to keep the light from showing outside, Nick was sure that the five men who had called there that evening were deep in some sort of discussion with the master spirit of the meeting—or, rather, with the master spirits, for Nick had not a doubt that Hermia was just as potent as Sheeny Mike himself.

The father and mother of John Horn had readily given their consent that their house be used by the detectives as a means of getting upon the roofs; they had offered no objection whatever when Nick explained to them the seriousness of the occasion.

And so, at last, the hour came for the attack—if attack it might be called.

Nick Carter, followed by his assistant, climbed out upon the sloping roof, and let himself carefully down to the level space near the eaves; for these houses were very old, of the Dutch period, and were not flat-roofed, like the more modern houses of the city.

In the middle of the front of each sloping roof there was a dormer window, and just over the peak of each roof, a scuttle.

In the Horn household the dormer window opened upon an attic which had never been used for other purposes than a catch-all; but as the two detectives passed along in front of this window of the Horn house, Nick remarked:

"It may be, Chick, that in the house at the end of the street they have utilized that room for one of their captives. I think, anyhow, that it should be the first one we will examine."

It was not a difficult matter to make their way along that coping to the house at the end of the street; the only danger was that they might possibly be seen against the sky-line from the street below, or from one of the houses; and if this should happen, and the alarm be given, their expedition would go for naught.

But they reached their destination without incident, and presently they both stopped directly in front of the dormer window of the house they intended to enter.

Their position, however, was considerably beneath it, so they could not be seen from the window unless, indeed, a person inside the room was standing close to it and should look directly at them.

But they could see that the window had already been made proof against escape from the inside, for there was a grating of strong iron bars across it.

"We will have to try the scuttle," said Chick; but the detective interrupted him.

"Wait," he said. "I want a closer view. It looks to me as if that iron screen has been taken from one of the basement windows and brought up here for temporary use; and if that is so, it has merely been nailed fast on the outside, don't you see? It should be very easily removed. Come, let us investigate."

"We will probably be seen from the inside, Nick."

"Doubtless, if we make any noise."

"And suppose they have some woman in the room with Loris—supposing Loris to be imprisoned in that room. Suppose they keep a female jailer with her?"

"That is a chance that we will have to take."

It must be understood that both detectives had realized beforehand what they would be up against, and had, therefore, provided themselves with such tools as they believed would be necessary to carry out their plans.

Therefore, when Nick crawled slowly up the sloping roof to the dormer window, and discovered that the iron grating had been fastened there by nothing stronger than heavy wire, he knew that it was only a question of a very few moments before the way into the house would be open to them.

He had nippers in one of his pockets, and as soon as Chick reached his side, he began using them to sever the wire fastenings, with the result that in less than five minutes the iron grating fell back into their hands, leaving the casing and sash of the window exposed to their attack.

As yet, no one inside the room had been disturbed; but now, as Nick reached forward to raise the sash, a white, scared face was pressed suddenly against one of the panes.

From the darkened room, peering out, even with the dim starlight, she could see the faces of the two men on the roof—and, of course, she saw only what appeared to be two Italian laborers who were attempting to force their way into the house.

In that one glance the detective recognized Loris Dent; and he saw her open her mouth as if to cry out; but he put his fingers to his lips to enjoin silence upon her, and, fortunately, she saw it in time to hold back the cry she had been about to utter.

Then, with a quick motion, he raised the sash.

"Hush, Loris!" he said. "I am Nick Carter. Don't make a sound!"

He would have said more, but she sprang quickly toward him, and leaned out of the window until her face was close to his; and she whispered:

"Be silent, Mr. Carter. I am not alone in this room. There is a negress here with me, to watch me. She is asleep now."

"All right," the detective whispered in reply. "Stand aside, Loris, until we can get inside. This is Chick who is with me. Where is the negress?"

Loris pointed toward one corner of the room, where the darkness was so dense that they could see nothing; but Nick stole softly across the floor until he stood beside a cot that was there, and then he flashed his light down upon the black face that rested upon the pillow.

The light roused the woman, and she half-started to rise; but before she realized what was happening, Nick had seized the pillow from beneath her head and had jammed it down over her face, thus effectually shutting off any sound she might have uttered.

And at the same time Chick came to his chief's assistance, so that in a very short time the huge negress—for she was a veritable giantess—was securely bound to the cot upon which she had been sleeping and a gag had been placed in her mouth, so that she could make no sound that was louder than a faint moan.

Then the detective stole out into the hall to listen, for he found a key to the door in the possession of the negress; but hearing no sound to denote that the occupants

of the house were anywhere near them, he returned to the attic room.

"This has been an exciting day for you, Miss Dent," he said to Loris.

"Oh, how I have prayed that somebody would come to my rescue," she responded. "It has been a day of terror. I scarcely know now how it all happened. I was in one of the stores. When I went outside again I found my guardian's coupé awaiting me exactly where I had left it—only there was a different coachman."

Nick nodded. "I understand," he said.

"The man jumped down to the pavement the moment he saw me, and told me that my own coachman had been taken suddenly ill, and had asked him to take his place for a little while. I saw that the coupé and the horse were ours, so I thought nothing of it, and stepped inside.

"But, Mr. Carter, there was not time to close the door of the carriage before a man stepped quickly forward from somewhere, and he was inside the coupé, beside me, and had the door closed before I realized it."

"And the horse started forward at the same moment, I suppose?" said the detective.

"Yes; not only that, but the man seized me and held me. At the same time, he told me that if I cried out or attempted to give any alarm, he would kill me; but that if I remained quiet, no harm would come to me."

"And you did so, eh?"

"I fainted away then. A woman always does that just at the moment when she ought not to. When I came to my senses again we were driving through a narrow street, and presently we stopped before the door of this house—and then, for the first time, I recognized the man who was with me."

"Sheeny Mike, wasn't it?"

"Yes; the man you call Sheeny Mike. What a handsome man he is! The very last one whom I could believe capable of such villainy."

"Never mind that. Go on with your story."

"When we stopped in front of this house, he told me that I must walk up the steps and into the house without assistance, so as not to attract attention. He threatened me with all sorts of things if I did not, and the result was that I did as he directed."

"And then——"

"Then I was brought directly to this room. The negress came here with me, and I have not seen a person since that time, except that negress, who is my jailer."

"Mike didn't come near you again, eh?"

"No."

"And you do not know about anything that has happened in this house since that time?"

"No; only what the old negress told me."

"What was that?"

"When she went down to get my supper to-night, she returned and told me that there were two more prisoners in the house. She said they were two detectives, and my heart sank, for I at once thought that you had got this far to rescue me, only to fall into the power of that dreadful man yourself."

"She did not tell you any more than that, did she? Where are they confined, or anything that will aid us in their rescue?" asked Nick.

"No. I have told you all I know."

Nick was silent a moment. Then he said:

"Loris, step to that window and look out. You will see that the only level space on the roof is a place about eighteen inches wide, right along the edge of it. It is rather high above the street, and it is a narrow place to walk."

"I see it," she said.

"Well, do you think you have got the nerve to walk along that narrow place with Chick and me? I want to get you out of this house and away from it before we proceed with the other things we have to do."

"But where will you take me? What will you do with me?"

"I will take you to the house where we came out upon the roof. They are very nice people there, and you will be well cared for until we call for you—and, in the meantime, no matter what happens in this house, you will be safe. Can you walk it?"

"Yes," she replied, "I think so."

Together the two detectives assisted her to climb down the steep roof to the narrow place along the top of the eaves, and then, with her hands upon Nick Carter's shoulders and with Chick's hands upon her shoulders to steady her, they walked, with almost the lock-step, safely along the perilous place until the house of the Horns was reached.

Nick had foreseen this event, and he had asked Mrs. Horn to wait up for them, and so presently Loris Dent was placed in the care of the good woman, who advised her to go to bed at once, and not to attempt to wait up for the return of her rescuers—for Loris was still dressed exactly as she had been when Sheehan captured her, even to her picture-hat.

And then, when Nick saw her safely cared for, he motioned to his assistant to follow him, and again they went out upon the roof, and started once more for the house at the end of the street.

"Here is where the real work begins, Chick," he said. "We will find Ten-Ichi and Danny, if we can, before we disturb Sheeny Mike and his friends. If we can do that, the odds will not be quite so great against us."

"We would be four, then, against six," said Chick.

"Against seven, Chick. In an affair of this kind, Hermia Bolton will count for a man. Don't forget that."

CHAPTER IX.

STIRRING UP A HORNET'S NEST.

They found everything exactly as they had left it, and the negress still lying bound and gagged upon the cot.

Nick lighted a small lamp that was in the room, and then he crossed over to the woman.

"I am going to remove that gag from your mouth, auntie," he said, "but I warn you now that if you attempt to cry out, or to give any sort of alarm, when I do so, it will be worse for you."

She rolled her eyes and nodded, as if she understood and acquiesced in what he had said to her, and he untied the gag and took it from between her teeth.

"Now," he said, "I want you to answer some questions."

"I ain't goin' to answer no questions unless you untie me," she replied doggedly.

"Oh, I think you will. If you don't, you'll get hurt."

"I won't—I won't—I won't," she insisted.

"There were two young men brought to this house this afternoon, and they are locked up in it somewhere now," said the detective slowly. "I want you to tell me where they are."

"I dunno," she replied, her eyes baleful and somber, as only the eyes of a sullen negro can look.

"What room are they confined in?" asked the detective again.

"I dunno," she repeated.

"Chick," said Nick, turning to his assistant, "set that lamp a little nearer to me. That is right. Now turn down the wick a little and then remove the chimney. Good. Now give me that pair of pinchers you have in your pocket."

Chick handed over the pincers, and Nick, after testing them a moment, stuck the business end of them into the blaze of the lamp.

All the time the negress watched him with that same sullen glare in her eyes; but when she saw him put the pincers into the blaze, her curiosity got the best of her.

"What fo' you doin' that?" she demanded.

"I am doing that in order to make those pincers hot," he replied calmly.

"What do you want 'em hot for?" she asked then.

"So that when I make use of them they will burn," he replied.

"Burn who, suh?"

"You."

"*Me!* 'Deed, suh, yo' ain't goin' to burn me, is you?" she gasped.

"That is exactly what I am going to do if you refuse to answer my questions."

"Look heah, boss, I cayn't tell yo' what I dunno, kin I?"

"No; but you can tell me what you *do* know. And you *do* know where those two young men are confined, in this house. That is what I want to know, and you have got to tell me."

"I don't know nuffin about no two young men, boss."

For reply Nick removed the pincers from the blaze and tested the heat they contained by moistening the end of his finger and touching them lightly.

"Not hot enough," he said, as if to himself.

The negress was watching him closely, and now her eyes began to lose their sullen look and to take on one of terror; for she really believed that the detective was about to torture her into telling what she knew; and at last, as if in spite of herself, she muttered in a low tone:

"Mebby yo' mean the two young men who done followed de boss home in an automobile."

"Yes," said the detective. "They are the ones I mean. Are you ready to answer my questions now?"

"You jes' ax what yo' want to know, and mebby if I kin, I'll answer 'em, suh; that is, if you'll put away that hot iron. I ain't going for to have no scars on my face, I ain't."

"Now you are talking sense. You know about those young men, don't you?"

"I don't know much about 'em. I knows a little, mebby."

"Well, tell me that little. Tell me what you do know."

"I know dat dey followed de boss, and that ain't healthy for anybody to do. De boss don't stan' for no nonsense, and if he knowed dat I was talkin' to you, he'd sure cut my old throat for me."

"Well, he doesn't know it, and he won't know it unless you tell him about it yourself. Tell me about those young men."

"The boss knowed dat he was followed, but he walked right into de house as if he never suspected it at all; and he left de do' open, to boot. And then when de young men came along, dey were fools enough, seeing de do' open, to run up de steps and inside de house.

"And de boss, he was a-settin' just near de do' and de minute dey entered de house he smacked one of dem over the head wid a stick and he hit de other one wid his fist, and den de madam she lit onto dem, too, and purty soon dey was both stowed away in de cellar, all tied up jes' as you've got me."

"They are down in the cellar of the house, you say?"

"Yes, suh."

"Are you quite sure that you are telling me the truth?"

"I shore is, suh."

"And both are bound and gagged?"

"Dey is."

"Otherwise are they unharmed?"

"So far as I know, dey is, only for de bumps dey got in de beginning, that I've done told you about already."

"Now, woman, there were five men who came into this house this evening. You know that, do you not?"

"I reckon I ain't no fool if I is black, suh."

"And I suppose those five men, together with the boss and the madam, are seated in one of the rooms of the house together. I want you to tell me what room they are in."

"I dunno."

"Chick, hand me those pincers again."

"I tell you I dunno. If I don't know, I dunno. I kin tell you where I think dey is."

"Well, tell me that."

"Dey is probably in the back parlor. And dat's sure all I knows about it."

"What is your name?"

"My name? My name is California Jackson, suh."

"You have worked for Sheeny Mike a long time, haven't you?"

"I's done kep' house fo' him twelve years, suh," she replied proudly. "What's dat to you, anyhow?"

"Nothing. Do you know those other men who are down-stairs?"

"No, I don't. Now, look heah—ain't that about all de questions you want to ask, suh?"

"Yes. I don't think you can give us any further information. Put that gag back in her mouth, Chick. We don't want her setting up a yell the minute we leave this room."

"Fo' de land's sake, suh, don't put dat thing back, please. I won't make a sound. I'll lie right here as quiet as a lamb, I will," she pleaded; and Nick, forgetting his caution for a moment, believed her.

The gag was not readjusted, and a moment later, after putting out the light, the two detectives left the room, closing and locking the door on the outside after them.

And Nick also removed the key and put it in his pocket; and then, with great care, and closely followed by his assistant, he began the descent of the stairs.

The attic room in which so much had already happened was at the top of the house; there were three stories and a basement beneath it, so Nick figured that they would have to descend three flights of stairs before they would be on the floor where the back parlor was located.

They had descended two of them and were approaching the third, when from the top of the house—apparently from the room where they had left the negress—a sudden cry rang out.

It was a strange and startling call, one which California Jackson must have inherited from her wild African ancestors. It was weird and uncanny. It rose and fell, like the cry of a banshee, like the wail of a lost spirit—and notwithstanding the fact that the door of the room where the woman had been left was closed and locked, that cry seemed to penetrate to the uttermost recesses of the house.

Only for the first note of it, it would have been impossible to locate the sound at all. It seemed to come from everywhere at once, and if Nick had not understood that it was the negress calling a warning to her master, he would not have known what to make of it.

And now, when it was too late, he realized the mistake he had made in not replacing the gag in the woman's mouth; for the cry had sounded but a moment when he heard below him a sudden rush of feet, the hasty opening and closing of a door, and then the sound of some person ascending the stairs.

In the meantime the cry was continued without cessation. It rose and fell; it half-died away at times only to be instantly renewed again, and it kept on and on like some weird song that was utterly without tune, and yet which was filled with an uncanny sort of harmony.

That it conveyed a message of warning the detective knew from the sounds he heard below him.

They had still one more flight of stairs to descend before they could reach the ground floor, but already somebody was ascending those stairs toward them, going with all speed toward that warning cry.

There was an open door near where Nick and Chick were standing, and through this, as if with one impulse, they both stepped; a moment later Mike Sheehan, followed by two of the men whom the detectives had seen enter the house that afternoon, rushed past them and hurried up the second flight toward the top of the house.

"Now, Chick!" exclaimed the detective in a whisper. "Come with me. It is our only chance now to capture them. We must tackle all three of them, but it must not be done until they are at the top of the house. Remember that there are three more men waiting down below, and that as soon as they hear the sound of a strug-

they are going to get to us as quickly as they can do it. Come!"

Silently, though swiftly, they dashed out of their place of concealment and ran up the stairs after the three crooks.

At the top flight Nick paused for one instant and whispered to Chick:

"Their united attention will be upon that door for a moment," he said rapidly. "It will balk them for a moment, because I locked it and put the key in my pocket. There will be just an instant of hesitation before they begin to break the door down, and in that instant we must attack them."

Again they started forward, and so swiftly did they go that they were at the top of the last flight, and upon the attic floor, before Sheehan had ceased his pounding on the door.

"What's the matter in there?" he called out; and then, just as California's voice was raised to answer him, the two detectives leaped forward upon the three men who stood with their backs toward them.

The attack came before any of the three men realized that anybody was near them at all, for if they had heard a sound, it is likely that they thought it made by some others of their own party who had followed them up the stairs.

As Nick leaped forward he struck the man who was nearest to him behind the ear with his fist, and sent him pitching forward as if he had been hit with a club; and at the same instant Chick's fist caught the second one in about the same spot, and sent him reeling after his companion.

But then, before either of the detectives could get at Sheehan himself, he wheeled in his tracks and confronted them.

How he accomplished what happened next, nobody could tell; but with a quick leap sideways he succeeded in darting past Chick's outstretched arms, and then, as he sped along the hall, he shouted some warning to his friends below-stairs—and then, even while they looked at him in the dim light of the hall, he disappeared.

CHAPTER X.

THE FIGHT ON THE ATTIC FLOOR.

For a moment the detective stared in amazement, for he could not tell at once how Sheehan had so completely gotten away; but as he leaped forward he saw that there was a close-fitting deal door through the wall, which in the darkness he had not seen, and it was through this that the robber had made his escape.

Instantly Nick had it open and had dashed after the escaping man; but he discovered at once that he was effectually headed off by the forethought of Sheeny Mike, who had evidently prepared this place for just such an emergency as had happened.

The way past the deal door led to the scuttle, which has been referred to before.

By slipping through that door as he had done, Sheeny Mike was able to reach the scuttle, to raise it and to pass through to the roof before either of the detectives could follow him, and he had also been able to close it and lock it on the outside, so that they could not pursue him.

"He has gone out by way of the roof," exclaimed the detective. "He has locked the scuttle, Chick, so we cannot follow him. We can reach him through the room where we left the negress."

They turned back into the hallway, intending to pass out upon the roof by the way they had entered the house, for Nick knew that Sheehan would have to slide down the sloping roof to the flat space above the eaves before he could go far.

As he ran forward he drew the key to the door from his pocket, but he had not gone half the distance back to the door of that room in which Loris had been a prisoner, when he saw that there was other work cut out for him.

One of the men who had been knocked down had already struggled to his feet; the other one was sitting up and holding his hand against his head in a half-dazed condition.

But that was not all. The three men who had been left on the ground floor and to whom Sheehan had called out a warning just before he made his escape, were already tumbling up the stairs, and even as Nick and Chick rushed forward, two of them arrived at the attic floor.

They were armed, too, and if their marksmanship had been as thorough as their intentions, this story might have ended right here.

They saw Nick and Chick rushing toward them, and all three of them fired at the same time.

Nick felt the corduroy cap he wore lift suddenly from his head, as if a breeze had caught it and carried it away, and Chick heard the whine of a bullet as it passed close to one of his ears. Otherwise, there was nothing from the three shots.

And the men who made the attack did not have time to fire a second time, for now Nick Carter was thoroughly roused; moreover he felt that it was up to him to do the very best he could with all these odds against him.

With a wild leap forward through the smoke, he struck the man nearest to him a short-arm blow full in the face; and he caught him as he reeled backward and raising him from his feet, hurled him bodily against the others.

Thus, three of them were carried to the floor, while Chick was kept busy with the other two—the two who had ascended the stairs with Sheehan, and who had now recovered sufficiently to put up a fight.

The man whom Nick struck and then flung at the others was unconscious; but the two who were thrown down by the impact of his body against them, quickly sprang to their feet, and as if they already had enough of that sort of a fight, they turned and ran toward the stairs with all the speed they could muster.

Nick saw them escaping; he also saw that Chick was beset by the remaining two men, and he turned and seized one of them, lifted him in his arms and with a short run to the head of the stairs, he threw him as he might have done with a child, over the balustrade, at the two men who were running away and who were already half-way to the next floor.

Did you ever set up dominoes in a row and then touch the last one, to see them all go down? That is the way those three fell to the bottom of those stairs.

But they were not stunned.

Apparently they were not even severely injured, for they leaped to their feet at once and continued their flight down the stairs.

"Look out for what is left up here, Chick!" shouted the detective; and he started down the stairs after them; not so much to capture these particular men—for truth to tell he cared nothing about them—but to go at once to the rescue of Ten-Ichi and Danny.

He could not tell what Sheeny Mike had done since his escape.

"Doubtless," thought the detective, "he had some way of getting to the ground at once, and if that is so, he might already be in the house again."

He did not dare to think further, for he knew that would be like the desperate character of Sheehan to return to the house long enough to murder both lads, if the idea should occur to him.

The men he was pursuing did not stop their flight in the hallway below, but they ran directly through to the front door, opened it and darted away through the night as if the devil were after them. It was evident that they had all three had enough of fight with Nick Carter and his assistant.

And Nick did not follow them out of the house.

At the ground floor he turned and went through to the back parlor, where he knew they had all been seated at the time of the alarm; but although the room was still ablaze with light, there was no one there.

A partly consumed bottle of wine was on the table, with some wafers, a box of cigars and several trays of ashes, showing how the party had been occupied when the alarm was sounded; but even Hermia was not there now.

It was at once evident to Nick that that cry of warning which Sheehan had uttered from the top of the house had been addressed to her, instead of to the men, and that she had at once obeyed the signal it gave her.

Doubtless the men had believed it to be intended to summon them to the rescue, never supposing that Sheehan had already left the house before they were half-way up the stairs.

It was now plain to the detective that that had been another preconcerted signal and that already Sheehan and Hermia Bolton were far away out of his reach, making good their escape.

He stepped out into the hall again and called to Chick.

"Disarm those fellows, Chick," he called, "and let them go. They are of no use to us and we don't want them. After you have done with them, kick open that door and set the wench free, also. We don't want to be bothered with her, either. When you have done that, come down to me. I am going to the cellar."

"All right," came the reply; and Nick Carter turned away in search of the cellar door.

He had no difficulty in finding it; but he had barely pulled it open before he was conscious of the pungent smell of burning powder; and at the same instant the voice of Danny called aloud from the darkness below.

"Hurry! For Heaven's sake, hurry!" he called.

With one leap the detective cleared the remaining

stairs and alighted upon the cemented floor of the cellar; and there, not ten feet away from him, sizzling along the floor like a crawling snake, was a thin stream of fire, moving rapidly.

Instantly Nick perceived what it was, and he threw himself forward just ahead of the fire so that he fell upon his face, and snatched away the shortened slow-match.

He was only just in time.

The instant the fire was put out, he brought his search-light into play and with it found the gas-jet. This he lighted and then he saw that a thin trail of powder had been laid to a keg that was filled with it, and that inside of ten seconds more, the keg must have been blown up and have taken the house and everything within it that was alive, with it.

And not six feet away from the keg, bound and fastened so they could not move, were Ten-Ichi and Danny; and they had been there, they told him, without a mouthful to eat or drink, since the moment of their capture.

"But what about that keg of powder?" asked Nick. "Who did that?"

"The woman," replied Ten-Ichi, shuddering, for he could not quite forget how close he had been to a horrible death.

"Hermia?" asked Nick.

"Yes. Hermia Bolton. She came down here only a few moments ago. She had a hatchet in her hand, and she came and stood over us with it raised. I thought she was going to brain us with it at first. But then she seemed to think better of it."

"She turned her attention to the powder, eh?"

"That keg stood over there, in the corner, twenty feet away. She threw it down on its side and rolled it over to where it is now. Then she knocked in the head and set the slow-match in it."

Nick was busily engaged in freeing them from their bonds while Ten-Ichi was explaining.

"She stopped once and lighted a match, but she evidently thought the train was not long enough for her own safety, for she blew the match out and made it as long again. If she had lighted it the first time, she would have had time enough and plenty to have gotten away, but we'd have been blown up before you got to us."

"The powder is pretty sure evidence of one thing, anyhow," said the detective.

"What is that?"

"That neither she nor Sheeny Mike have any thought of returning to this house."

"I think they were fixing to leave, anyhow," said Ten-Ichi.

"Why do you think that, my lad?" asked the detective.

"I heard them talking together about it. Something was said by the woman about the risk of leaving the automobile—yours, I mean—out there in Bank Street, and Sheehan replied to the effect that they wouldn't be here after to-night, anyway, and he hardly thought that any danger would be floating around to-night. I heard more than that, too."

"What more, Ten-Ichi?"

"It wasn't anything definite, of course, but I gathered from what was said that they have fixed up a new retreat which they consider safe and sure. They referred to it as the 'Strong Box.' I heard Sheeny say: 'When once we are safely inside the Strong Box, all the Nick Carters from Dan to Beersheba can't find us, Hermia.' He said, also, this: 'We can get to it by water or by land, or we can leave it either way, and all we need is eight or ten good men to form the gang, and we will be established.'"

"Hark!" said Nick suddenly; and, listening, they could hear somebody hurrying down the stairs from the upper floors to the main floor.

"Ten-Ichi," said the detective suddenly, "there goes one of the men I told Chick to set free. There is just a chance that he may know of that place you speak of, and may go there. Are you well enough to take his trail now and follow him?"

"Indeed I am."

"Then do so. Danny, if you wish to go with him, you may. Let me know, lads, the minute you discover anything. We haven't caught Sheeny Mike yet, and I want him badly; and also Hermia, so do your best. Skip, now."

They were up the cellar stairs and out after the man who had just left the house, as soon as the detective stopped speaking; and then as Nick Carter ascended the stairs, he met Chick at the top of them.

"Well?" he asked of his assistant; and Chick smiled rather grimly.

"Sheehan found time to step into the room through the window and set the wench free," he said. "Either he did that, or she managed to free herself, and also ca-

cape by way of the roof. And, Nick, I think we had better get back to Horn's house as soon as possible, for I cannot get it out of my head that Sheeny Mike may have traced her there. Heaven only knows what has happened, if that is so."

CHAPTER XI.

THE SECOND DISAPPEARANCE OF LORIS.

"We will return, then, by the way we came," said the detective, "for that is the direction from which we will be expected. Come!"

Having put out the lights and locked the front door of the house at the end of the street, they mounted the stairs for the last time and passed through the room where Loris had been imprisoned, and thence out upon the roof, closing the window after them. Then with all speed they made their way along the flat part of the roof to the home of the Horns and entered it.

Then they stopped and listened, but no sound whatever came to them, and, moreover, where they had expected to find a light to welcome them, all was darkness.

They passed through the first room into the hallway, and here again all was darkness; and then the detective stopped short in his tracks, for he plainly heard the sound of a moan proceeding apparently from a room on the floor below them.

He hurried forward, closely followed by Chick, and in a moment they were down the stairs and close to the door from beyond which Nick thought the sound had come; and he remembered now that this was the room which Mrs. Horn had told Loris she might occupy.

Without hesitation he threw open the door, and then he uttered an exclamation of surprise.

With her hands and feet tightly bound with cords, and with a gag in her mouth to prevent outcry, Mrs. Horn had been thrown across the bed. On the floor, halfway between the bed and the door where the detective stood, was Mr. Horn. He was unconscious, and there was blood on his face where he had been struck and knocked senseless by some blunt instrument—probably a black-jack.

Loris was not there.

Instantly Nick leaped forward and tore the bonds and the gag from Mrs. Horn, while Chick devoted himself to the man on the floor, who opened his eyes and looked around him in a daze as soon as water was splashed upon his face.

Nick gave the woman a glass of water to drink, and he patted her face with a wet towel, so that she was very soon able to speak.

"Now," said the detective, "would you mind telling us what has happened?"

"Oh, that terrible man!" she exclaimed, in reply.

"Yes. I know that, madam; but will you tell me just what happened?"

"Well, sir, you know when you left I was trying to induce Miss Dent to take off her clothes and go to bed; but she would not do that. All that she would consent to do was to lie down on top of the bed with her clothes on; and she asked me if I wouldn't stay in the room with her."

"Which you did, of course," said Nick.

"Yes. I fixed her comfortably, and then I laid down on that couch. We talked together for a while, for I had no notion of going to sleep until you came back, sir."

"I suppose not. Please go on. I want to know what happened afterward."

"Well, notwithstanding my determination not to go to sleep, I must have done so, for it was apparently only a moment later when I was roused by feeling something touch my face, and I started wide-awake on the instant."

"Go on, please."

"A man was standing over me, and he was already trying to force that horrible gag into my mouth, but I managed to push him aside for an instant, and then I screamed."

"That, I suppose, is what brought your husband to this room?" said Nick.

"Yes. He heard me scream, and he rushed to me at once. But the man who was here heard him coming. I forgot to tell you that there was a terrible-looking negro woman with him, and she began to force the gag into my mouth while the man went toward the door to wait for my husband.

"You may be sure, sir, that he rushed into the room without stopping to consider what he might find here, and, of course, that man was waiting for him. My husband had not crossed the threshold before the man hit him with some heavy thing that he held half-concealed in his hand, and my husband went down like a log, and he hasn't moved from that time until you came into the room."

"But Loris? Where is Loris? What became of Loris?"

"Alas, sir, I do not know. I did not hear a sound from her at all. I think they must have attacked her and gagged her before they troubled themselves about me at all; or else she only fainted away when she saw them. I did not hear a sound from her, and when they threw me upon the bed, I was in such a position that I could not see anything in the room. She is gone, is she?"

"Yes."

"Then they must have carried her away."

"The puzzle is," said Chick, "how did Sheehan know that Loris was in this house?"

"I think," replied the detective, "that he worked that out just as you or I would have done it, Chick."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, for one thing, those friends of his who were there to-night might have told him, when they arrived, that they had seen two Italians seated on the steps of this house, talking with a boy, and if he afterward found two Italians on the top floor of his house, it would suggest—or, rather, it would remind him of what his friends had told him.

"Again, he knew, of course, that we got into his house by way of the roof. When he went out through the scuttle and slid down the roof past the dormer-window, he saw that the iron bars were gone. Probably he thought that Loris might still be there, and he went inside.

"The result was that he found that she had been carried away, and he also found the nigger wench.

"And don't you see, Chick, that the wench could tell him which way we went when we took Loris away from the house? Sheehan had only to go in the same direction and examine the scuttles and the dormer-windows as he went. He was bound to find that this was the house we came from, in the end; and, of course, he knew that Loris was somewhere inside of it, for the reason that we had not had time to take her away."

"Well, now that he has got her again, what do you suppose he has done with her?" asked the assistant.

"That is rather hard to answer," replied the detective. "We have already seen enough of Mike Sheehan to know that he never stops anywhere without having a 'getaway' all arranged. He had one at the place in Fourteenth Street, and he had one here, as we already know."

"But he probably didn't foresee the likelihood of having to carry an unconscious girl in his arms through the streets at the dead of night," argued Chick.

"Probably that is just what he did foresee. That colored chauffeur with the automobile couldn't have been so very far away from here. I haven't a doubt that when Sheehan called down the stairs to Hermia, he uttered an agreed upon signal that she was to skip out and get the automobile and with it was to meet him at a certain spot—probably right out here at the corner. There is nobody alive in this street at this time of night. He would only have to carry Loris as far as the corner."

"Then the confounded crook has beaten us out, after all!" said Chick, with disgust.

"He certainly has for this time, Chick. All that we succeeded in doing was to set Ten-Ichi and Danny free and save them from being blown into eternity. But I haven't told you about that part of it. They had fixed to blow the whole house up, and before Hermia fled she went into the cellar and set a fuse to a keg of powder. I found it just in time."

"It proves one thing, though," said Chick. "They have no intention of returning to that house."

"Yes. I made that remark myself. Ten-Ichi overheard some talk between Sheehan and Hermia, about a retreat they have been fixing up which they referred to as the 'Strong Box,' and——"

"The 'Strong Box'?" said Chick, with a little show of excitement. "By jingo, Nick! but I believe I am onto their game right now!" and he dove his hand into the breast pocket of his coat and produced a folded sheet of paper which he carried over to the table under the light and started to open.

"What have you got there?" asked the detective, following him.

"It is something I found in the back parlor of that house at the end of the street," replied Chick. "I went in there and looked around a bit while you were down in the cellar, and I found this under the table, half-concealed under the edge of a hassock that was there evidently for Hermia to rest her feet upon. I think now that I know what it is, Nick."

"What?" asked the detective, taking it in his hand and scanning it narrowly.

But after a moment he uttered a low whistle of pleasure, and said quietly:

"It is very plain what it is, Chick."

"Tell me what you make of it."

"I want to go back a bit before I do that, in order to explain as I go along. Ten-Ichi overheard some talk

between Sheehan and Hermia. Among other things, he heard Sheehan say that once they were in the 'Strong Box' all the Nick Carters in the world couldn't catch them. Another thing was that they could get to and from the place, that is, in or out of it, by water as well as by land. Understand?"

"Yes."

"Now we will refer to the paper. Oh, yes, there was another thing he said that is quite pertinent just now. He told Hermia that they would need a gang of eight or ten good men around them to insure the success of what they intended to do. Catch on, Chick?"

"Yes."

"Well, those five men who were there to-night were a part of that prospective gang. When that wench gave that infernal screech of hers which warned them that something was happening, Sheehan was just in the act of explaining to his new men how to find this place he calls the Strong Box—and he was illustrating what he was saying with a pencil and this sheet of paper.

"Don't you know, Chick, that there are some men who never can describe anything unless they have a pencil in their hands at the time—a pencil and some paper to mark upon?"

"Yes."

"It serves two purposes. It is the key to concentration on the part of the one who is doing the talking, and it also makes things plainer to the others. I see that Sheehan has written the words 'Strong Box' at the top of this page."

"That is what made me remember it when you used those words," said Chick. "I had forgotten until then that I had the paper in my pocket."

The detective spread the paper under the light upon the table and studied it in silence for a considerable time, with wrinkled brow and utter concentration of mind.

But suddenly his brow cleared, and he struck his hand down with emphasis upon the paper.

"I've got it!" he said.

"Have you? How?" asked Chick, bending forward eagerly.

"These two lines here represent the Hudson River, for these big cliffs here can be nothing less than the Palisades. Don't you agree with me about that?"

"Yes; I think I do."

"Then, if we are right, this cross here must represent the Fort Lee Ferry, and this crooked line along here the trolley which runs up the hill, and, after passing through the village of Fort Lee, one branch of it goes off directly toward the north—same as this line. See?"

"Yes."

"Well, here is another cross, and near it are a lot of dots, doubtless to represent woods. The cross means that right here is the place to leave the trolley. And now look: here is a faint and wavering line which runs down toward the river, and there is shading on each side of it. The line runs between the shading, which means, I think that the path is through a ravine or a gully. By Jove, Chick! I believe I know the place. There used to be a cavern up there. I arrested some crooks there, years ago, and we supposed the place was destroyed with dynamite afterward. I wouldn't wonder if Sheehan has found that the place can be used again. I believe that's the place where we'll find him, Chick."

CHAPTER XII.

NICK CARTER STEALS A MARCH.

Nick Carter did not believe in permitting the grass to grow under his feet, once he had decided what it was best to do, and, having made many apologies to the Horns, together with thanks for all they had done for them, he hurried his assistant into the street.

"Chick," he said, then, "I believe that I am right about that place under the Palisades. A gang of counterfeiters used to have it, and they lived there a long time in perfect security. I think it was as much by accident as anything else that I finally found the retreat and routed them out."

"But you said the place was afterward destroyed with dynamite."

"It was—or, rather, it was supposed to be. The county authorities attended to it, and I was informed that it had been done. What they did was probably to blow up the ends of the place without destroying it altogether, and since that time some enterprising crook has found it and dug it out again; and that crook has given the secret to Sheehan, and there you are."

"Was it called the Strong Box then?"

"I don't remember—but that makes no difference, anyhow. The point is that plan. With that under my eyes I had no difficulty in recognizing it—*and I know how to get there in the quickest time, too.*"

"How?"

"By boat. If we are smart we ought to get there, even now, before Sheehan can do it. Come!"

"Where are you going?"

"To the subway. We will take the train to 155th Street and Broadway. We will go down the hill to the river there and I know where there are a lot of launches handy."

"But there won't be anybody around at this hour to hire one of, will there?"

"No; and we won't wait to find anybody, either. We will take a launch without asking permission, and we will explain and pay for it when we return."

"All right. I'm game."

"You see, if Sheehan has started for that place in his automobile, he has got to run all the way to the 130th Street ferry on this side, and then has the long run over the steep hills on the other side; or he would cross by one of the down-town ferries and run up the roads on the Jersey side. Either route is three or four times longer than the one we will take, so we ought to be at the Strong Box, as he calls it, a half-hour or an hour before he can possibly get there."

"It does look that way."

"We should be there before daylight; whereas, I don't believe that he can make it before an hour after daylight, to save his life."

"Won't it be a surprise-party for him, though, if he walks in and finds us there waiting for him?"

"Yes," replied the detective grimly, "and that is exactly the sort of a surprise-party I would like to prepare for him."

They were fortunate enough to just catch the train they wanted, and they were soon at 155th Street; and here they hurried rapidly down the steep hill to the water's edge.

The river-bank along that part of the city is lined with boat-houses and with boat clubs of all kinds and descriptions; and at that particular hour in the morning—it was after three o'clock—the neighborhood was entirely deserted.

But there were boats there, any quantity of them; and Nick spied one that was fastened to a buoy some distance from the shore which looked as if it were about what he wanted.

"That one out there looks as if it would do nicely," he said. "Help me to put this skiff into the water. I can paddle out to the launch with this piece of board."

They were speedily aboard the little craft, and a few minutes' investigation assured them that the engine was in perfect working order, and also that there was a sufficient supply of gasoline; so they cast off, having made the skiff fast to the buoy, and three minutes later they were chug-chugging across the river at a speed of eight miles or more an hour.

"This is fine," said Chick. "Are you sure that you know exactly where to go?"

"Sure? I remember it as if I were there yesterday."

"Isn't it possible that Sheehan has gone there by boat, and that he will be there ahead of us?"

"It is possible; but it isn't at all probable. You see, Chick, he had that automobile in the city, and I don't think he wanted to leave it there. And, anyhow, he would have been obliged to make use of it for a time in order to carry Loris away from Horn's house. Once in it, I think he would stay in it, until he got to the Strong Box."

Nick directed the course of the launch straight across the river, but when he was near the opposite shore he turned northward, and, running as close to the shadow of the rocks as he dared, he studied the landmarks and watched out for the place where he wanted to land.

At last he saw it, and he slowed the engine down until it was running only at half-speed; and then he turned her head directly toward the shore.

"There is the ravine, Chick," he said, pointing ahead of them toward a spot against the rocks that was blacker by contrast than the surrounding gloom. "It is a very narrow ravine; it is, in fact, almost a fissure, but it runs way back among the hills, and the entrance to it at the upper end is so well concealed that you might walk past it every day of your life for years without ever suspecting it was there.

"And half-way up that ravine there is a place where it broadens out considerably, and at that point is the entrance to the cavern—or, rather, it used to be there. There is a little natural cove here, at the base of the cliff, into which we can run the boat, and she will be safe there until we return for her. Now, go forward, will you, and be ready to leap out as soon as we touch the shore."

Chick obeyed, and a moment later the keel grated on the beach. Then they both sprang out and the boat was quickly made fast.

"Now, Chick," said the detective, "you may as well make use of your light. Only be careful. We don't know who may be there. Sheehan probably hasn't come yet, but he may have other confederates who are already here."

The detective led into the fissure, in utter silence, using his flash-light only just enough to enable him to pick his way over the rocks.

And so for almost half an hour they went on up that rocky road until at last the detective came to a halt and waited for his assistant to overtake him.

"Here we are," he said. "The entrance to the cavern is right here. It is as I suspected. Some enterprising individual has dug a way through the rocky wall that was made by the dynamite. I think, Chick, that we cannot do better than to wait right yonder, behind those two rocks. You take the right one and I'll take the one to the left. Now, remember, there may be two men in the party, for Sheehan may bring that colored chauffeur down here with him. Or he may not. It is getting light now, and I don't think we will have long to wait."

Nevertheless, considerably more than an hour passed after they had taken up their positions before they heard a sound; and in the meantime daylight had come upon them.

But the two detectives were thoroughly screened behind the boulders they had chosen, and those who were approaching would have to pass within arm's length of both of them in order to enter that wider part of the fissure from which entrance was to be had to the cavern.

At last, however, the murmur of voices came to them plainly, down the fissure.

First it was Hermia's silvery laugh which floated toward them, and then the deep tones of Mike Sheehan in an answering burst of merriment. It was evident that something amused them hugely.

And then, as the people drew nearer, they could hear another voice which both recognized as belonging to California Jackson.

But there were no other voices, and Nick made up his mind that the negro chauffeur was not one of the party.

Nearer and nearer they came, and at last the critical moment was at hand.

Sheehan was in advance of the others, and he stepped out from between the boulders behind which the detectives were concealed; and as he did so he half-turned to explain to Hermia that they had arrived.

He made the turn just as Nick Carter started toward him, and he saw the shadow of the detective as Nick leaped forward.

Always on the alert, he tried to evade the attack; he tried to leap away and also endeavored to pull a weapon from his pocket.

But he was too late to accomplish either act, for the detective had calculated nicely the distance he had to cover and in an instant he had Sheehan by the throat and had thrown his other arm around the crook's body.

And this very attack had given Chick the opportunity he needed, for Hermia had turned her back squarely toward him when she saw Sheehan attacked, so that before she knew that there were two enemies at hand, she had handcuffs upon her wrists behind her back.

The wench, California, turned with a screech and ran wildly up the ravine again, disappearing quickly from view, and Loris Dent, who at once took in the situation and realized what was happening, ran forward, and, reaching into Hermia's pocket, took a revolver from it and calmly pointed it at its owner.

"Go and help Mr. Carter," she said to Chick. "If this woman tries to run away, I'll ask her to remember that I am a Western girl, and know how to shoot."

But Nick did not need any help, for just as Loris made the suggestion, he succeeded in throwing Sheehan heavily to the ground, where his head struck so solidly against the rocky floor that he stiffened out and lay there, senseless.

And when he came to, a half-hour later, he found that he was tightly bound so that there was no hope of escape, and that Hermia, also bound, was seated beside him; and both were tied so that they could not leap out of the swift little launch that was carrying them rapidly across the river to New York.

* * * * * * *

And that is the end of this story.

Loris was returned to her guardian, none the worse for her unpleasant experiences.

Sheehan got ten years at Sing Sing, and Hermia was sentenced to eight.

THE END.

The next number of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY—553—will contain, besides the usual departments, a complete story entitled "A Mystery From the Klondike; or, Nick Carter's Double-headed Case."

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

NEW YORK, July 27, 1907.

TERMS TO NICK CARTER WEEKLY MAIL SUBSCRIBERS.

(*Postage Free.*)

Single Copies or Back Numbers, 5c. Each.

3 months	65c.	One year	$2.50
4 months	85c.	2 copies one year	4.00
6 months	$1.25	1 copy two years	4.00

How to Send Money—By post-office or express money order, registered letter, bank check or draft, at our risk. At your own risk if sent by currency, coin, or postage stamps in ordinary letter.

Receipts—Receipt of your remittance is acknowledged by proper change of number on your label. If not correct you have not been properly credited, and should let us know at once.

STREET & SMITH, Publishers,
79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York City.

TALKS WITH OUR READERS.

I am fond of boating, but I read of so many terrible accidents happening on the water that it takes away much of my pleasure when afloat. Can you tell me what rules one should go by when rowing with, or without, company, in order to lessen the chances of a spill. I should be obliged for an answer.

Bridgeport, Connecticut. BLACK-EYED SUSAN.

Certainly we can give a little good advice along this line, and, if followed, it may be the means of saving many a member of a boating-party from a wetting, or even something more serious.

The following "rules" have been compiled by an old oarsman who never had a mishap on the water during the whole of his career.

First of all remember that a boat is not intended to be used as a ballroom; also, that, at the best, there are but one or two inches between you and the water.

On entering a boat, step as near the center and middle as possible. Do not jump. Walk to the seat you intend to occupy, keeping to the center always.

Do not change seats while the boat is in motion.

Standing up, moving about, and rocking from side to side, are three dangerous tricks and should be avoided.

Take care, when on the sea, to avoid pulling your oar in the air when there is a trough or interval between two waves. On the other hand, avoid a heavy wave which may dash the oars out of your hands. Watch for high waves and heavy seas.

Don't overcrowd a boat.

Should you capsize always remember that an upturned boat makes a good life-preserver, and that if a dozen persons will simply catch hold of the boat and not attempt to climb upon it they will be safe until assistance arrives, if it be within a reasonable distance.

A floating oar also makes an excellent support, provided too much weight is not placed upon it.

Even down in old Mexico I must have my favorite weekly, or life would hardly be worth while. I wish some of the readers could see the strange things that happen here. I could write for hours in trying to describe them. For one thing, there is the way of getting the big alligators that frequent the lagoons and streams. I have been told the same trick is practised in Florida and along southern Louisiana, but I have not seen it.

When hunting at night the hunters carry bright lanterns, for nothing bewilders an alligator like a strong light. The reptiles are thus so dazzled and confused that a sportsman can approach within a few feet of them. He then, with a rifle or a revolver, shoots them in the eye or under the fore leg.

In dry weather, when the streams are parched, the alligators often make their way to the prairies in search of water-holes. In the neighborhood of these holes the reptiles burrow in the ground, and the hunters then go armed with long poles furnished with hooks, with which they drag the alligators to the surface and despatch them.

Some other time I shall describe some more queer experiences I have met with in this "hot tamale" country of the dons.

Monterey, Mexico. JOHN J. SACKETT.

In a number of the "Nick Carter Weekly" you make mention of the term "riding and hitching" when Nick was among the Southern mountains. Now, I have only a hazy idea as to what is meant, and would you mind explaining this to an old and admiring reader. JOHN C. SCHENCK.

Philadelphia, Pa.

With pleasure, John. A certain mode of transportation among the people of southern West Virginia, and other Southern States, is known as "riding and hitching." It is resorted to when two travelers find themselves with only one horse, and they are going too far to ride "double." In "riding and hitching," one traveler takes the horse and goes a mile or more, while the other foots it behind. The equestrian naturally makes faster speed than the walker; so, after he has ridden his share, he dismounts and hitches his steed to a tree by the roadside and pushes on afoot. In time, the other walker comes to the hitched animal, mounts him, and rides on until he has overtaken the first rider and got some distance in front, when the operation is repeated. Thus each rides alternately, and the horse gets a breathing-spell.

Will you please answer a question for me? I am very fond of reading the stories of "Nick Carter," and consider them far and above any similar tales to be found in our country. Indeed, you would have to go to Sir Conan Doyle or to Gaboriau to find their equal. The clever manner in which Nick manages to discover the true inwardness of things, no matter how badly they are mixed, seems to be just what pleases my mind, for I am a lawyer. I give you my word for it I know of at least one learned judge of a New York court who reads every issue of your weekly magazine, and with the keenest delight. What I want to know is this—can I get the earlier numbers of the "Nick Carter Weekly," those you tell me are out of print, by purchasing copies of the Magnet Library, written by Nicholas Carter? I will consider it a favor if you reply either by mail or in the paper.

New York City. R. H. G.

We appreciate all that you say with regard to the peculiar charm of the story. We have also heard that several judges find it not only entertaining, but instructive to read up on the peculiar phases of detective-work as illustrated by the clever pen of our writer. Yes, each of the Nick Carter "Magnets" contains from two to four of the earlier numbers of our weekly, with a few slight changes.

"Good morning, gentlemen; I hope I don't intrude?"

A stylish, mild-mannered man thus addressed a group of yeggmen and all-around crooks in the jail down in a Georgia town. They eyed him suspiciously, without moving. They supposed he was a detective, with a mission to look them over and see if among those present was the man wanted.

"My name is Charles Parsons," went on the caller; "I am district superintendent for the Friends of the Friendless. Our purpose is to visit jails and hold religious services, where permitted. May I talk to you a while?"

Then there was a change in the expression of the men standing about him. It was a relief to the hunted men to find he was not a hunter.

"Come right in, brother, and make yourself at home," said a tall man, with tattoo-marks on his broad arms. "Don't take that stool, it's cracked; here's a better one. Now, boys, keep still while the gentleman makes his talk. Go right ahead, mister; we're listening."

The visitor read from his Bible, sang a song or two, and then talked in a kind, fatherly way. He did not chide, did not even criticize. These men were his brothers and his mission was to point them to a better way of life.

Every man listened with deference; some shed tears. All appeared affected. When he was through the tattooed man begged Mr. Parsons to send him some good literature, and some songs of a helpful nature; he would then read and sing to his prison mates and prepare them to follow the right path when they got out.

The prison missionary was gratified and readily agreed to do what the tattooed man asked. He said he felt as if he had been at a revival-meeting where the result was unanimous. Then he shook hands all around, the tattooed man following him to the death-cage, and left the prison.

Within a month the tattooed man, with a companion, attacked the sheriff, hammered him into almost insensibility, and made his getaway. The companion was shot by the sheriff's son.

The other day the literature and songs arrived for the tattooed man, and the sheriff will give an even $100 to anybody who can tell him where to deliver them.

Dynamite is produced by the admixture of nitroglycerin with a silicious infusorial earth, known under the German name as *kieselguhr*, and in appearance looks like brown sugar. The various processes are carried on in isolated wooden buildings, about twenty yards from each other, and surrounded by massive banks of earth. Nitric and sulfuric acids having been mixed, the temperature being maintained as low as possible by cold water and compressed air, the acids are run into a large leaden tank and further cooled, when glycerin is injected by means of compressed air. This process, being one of considerable danger, has to be closely watched. The nitroglycerin now formed is drawn off and washed in an alkaline solution to remove any acidity, and is then incorporated with the *kieselguhr* in the proportion of 1 to 3. Cartridges, about one inch to seven-eighths inch diameter by three and a half inches long, are then made up, wrapped in vegetable parchment, and packed in boxes covered with water-proof oil-paper, with instructions and cautions on them in different languages. Government regulations, both as to the storage and transport of dynamite, are stringent and restrictive.

Quite by accident I came into possession of your publication, a boy leaving one behind him on a bench in the park. I began to read to kill time, and soon became so deeply interested that I sat there until I had read every word. Somehow there was that in the story to set me thinking—many things similar to my own miserable experience. I saw a light, and began to reason matters out with myself. I was rapidly drifting toward a criminal life; but awoke with a shock before it was too late. I really believe the finding of that paper, story, which seemed to apply so forcibly to my own life, was the last chance, a straw thrown out to a drowning man, and that had I chosen to toss it away my case was hopeless. Now, I have turned over a new leaf. I seem to be able to see the error of my ways as never before. I am doing honest day's work now—no matter how humble, and I do not dread to meet a policeman at any time. I could even endure an interview with Nick Carter himself. Somehow, I feel indebted to your little publication and I read it each week, if only to discover more of the terrors of that life toward which I was so surely drifting. After a while, when I look myself, and feel fully cured, I'm going home to the old farm, home to mother and father and a girl I once cared for, and who is often in my mind of late. A YOUNG HOOSIER.

Chicago.

We can only say we think you have done wisely, and when you get home we hope and believe you will receive such a welcome as that other repentant prodigal did.

Visitors to Eastport, Long Island, during early March, were much interested in a peculiar mode of fishing in vogue among juvenile anglers and familiarly known as "tickling." The boy practising it lies on his side on the bank of the pond and shakes his hand beneath the surface of the water. The yellow perch, engaged in spawning, are attracted by the agitation and crowd into his hand. Then, by closing his fingers quickly, he clutches the fish, which is thrown dexterously on the bank, and the operation is repeated.

This method must be practised on moonless nights, the least light exposing the fishermen being inimical to success. Sometimes a dozen boys may be seen at one time lying along the village dam, and many bushels of perch are caught on a single fishing-excursion.

THE SHERIFF'S STORY.

BY PHILIP LINCOLN.

Well, sir, if you care to hear it, I'll tell you the story, though it isn't a very jolly one. I was sheriff of the county at the time, so I had a good bit to do with the affair.

This little Brune, as she was called, was the daughter of old man Waldorf, who owned the big farm two miles out from the edge of town on the Lynnville road.

I suppose old Waldorf was the meanest, stingiest old cuss that ever lived in this section, but, just the same, his daughter, little Brune, was the sweetest and prettiest little chip of a girl that ever lived anywhere around here, so it was a kind of a stand-off.

She was the one thing on earth that the old man loved, and nothing was too good for her. She always had the gayest gowns of any of the girls, and the old man did everything in his power to make her happy. And she was happy. It would have done you good, sir, just to see her dance once, with her bright eyes sparkling like stars, and her apple-blossom cheeks turning pinker and prettier all the time.

Well, you can be sure the old man wasn't alone in loving her. She was too kind-hearted to give anybody the dead shake until she was forced to, and so all the young men around here were crazy about her, and I guess about half of them thought she was in love with them. But one night Mort, my son, came home and walked up to me and shook hands with me, and said:

"Father, what do you think?" and then stopped.

I says:

"If you mean what was I thinking about just now, I was thinking that you got beat out of about twenty dollars on that sorrel mare you bought of Mose Dowling."

"Oh, confound the sorrel mare," he replied, for he was pretty sore about that trade. "I wish you would let up on that. I've more'n got even with Mose since then, anyway."

"Well, then," said I, "what's the matter with you? Out with it!" for I saw he was excited about something.

"Only this," he replied; "Brune Waldorf has promised to be my wife, and I am the happiest man on earth."

"And the luckiest, too, you rascal," and then I did shake hands with him. You see, I didn't even know he was trying for her until then; he had been so sly. But I tell you, sir, those still-hunts are a great thing.

Well, then, Mort up and told me all about it. And you ought to have heard that boy run on. You would think, sir, that such a beautiful, and sweet, and winning creature had never been heard of. And to tell the truth, I never had seen such a fine girl before. She was a little girl, but, as I told you, wonderful pretty, and as good-hearted as they make them. Mort was tall and straight, and the strongest young man in our parts, and as we were pretty well off, it wasn't such a bad match for her, either. I guess we sat up till twelve o'clock that night talking, and Mort told me all she said to him, and how he would die for her, and how much she said she

loved him; and I was very glad to hear him. It isn't often, sir, that such a son tells his love secrets to his father; but Mort and I had been alone since his mother died, fifteen years before, and we naturally thought lots of each other.

It was only about two weeks after that that little Brune went out alone one day to pick blackberries in her father's wood pasture, and soon after old Mr. Waldorf got in his wagon and went to town. So there was nobody about the house but the two hired girls, for all the men were out in the field. The women were very busy, and they didn't even think about Brune till dinner-time. Then, when one of the hands noticed that she didn't seem to be about the place, he asked:

"Miss Brune out visitin'?"

Then Mandy, one of the hired girls—the sandy-haired one—spoke up pert and exclaimed:

"For the land sakes, Job Marshall, I hope you're not in love with her, too!" and the men all laughed at Job till he got red as a beet.

But by and by, Mandy became anxious about her young mistress, too, and was going to call in the men from the field, and have them hunt for Brune; but the other girl laughed at her, and said she was a fool—that Brune had probably slipped over to some neighbors' and stopped for dinner.

Supper-time came, and Waldorf got back from town, and when Mandy told him, he literally cursed her and the other girl for not doing what Mandy started to do—call in the men and have them search the woods for Brune. He took the horn from the peg and blew it, and the men came in, wondering what on earth had got into the old man—for it lacked a full hour of the time they generally quit. It wasn't long before they were in the woods hunting for her.

They hunted more than an hour, and then Waldorf sent a man on horseback to all the neighbors to see if any one had seen Brune that day, and to tell them she was lost. There are always tramps through our section, and you know the horrible stories the newspapers tell. Well, old man Waldorf thought of them, and he was nearly wild. Then he sent another man to town to get more men to help search, and by nine o'clock there were between two and three hundred men in the woods, and among them was Mort and myself, and a fellow by the name of Smith—Mark Smith—who kept close to me all the time. Smith was about the craziest of all the young fellows who were after Brune, so I wasn't surprised to see he was pale as a ghost.

When I saw Smith I began to think of something Mort told me Brune had said. It seemed that Smith was madly in love with her, and she had a powerful dislike for him, but she was too kind-hearted to let on to him. That night Mort asked Brune to marry him she told him how she feared Smith, and begged Mort not to tell any one about the engagement for a few weeks, anyhow, for she was afraid it would cause trouble between Mort and Smith if Smith heard of it. Mort just laughed, and said if Smith thought he could lick him he was willing to have it tried on. But Brune said, pleading-like:

"I know you needn't be afraid of him, Mort, if he fights fair, but suppose he should shoot you dead?" and then she began to tremble.

"Well, you beautiful little darling," said Mort, "if he's going to shoot me, he will be as apt to do it three weeks from now if he hears it then, as he would if he heard it now."

But Brune coaxed him so sweetly that he couldn't say no, so he agreed that their engagement should be kept secret until they were married, if possible.

This wood pasture of Waldorf's was a very mean place to hunt for anybody in. In the first place, there were about four hundred acres of it, and in the second place, the brush was so thick—there was more brush than there was timber, and it was a regular jungle. Hazel, and blackberry, and raspberry, and elder bushes were thick. We hunted around in the wood till nigh on to midnight, when Smith said suddenly:

"Hark!"

I listened and heard a gun fired several times. That was the signal to tell that she was found, so I started for the place where the sound came from. I hadn't gone far before I heard them coming, and pretty soon I met them, and there was Mort coming along with the girl's body in his arms. I said:

"What is it, Mort?"

He was walking fast and didn't see me until I spoke, and then he sort of faltered for a minute, and said:

"She's dead!"

And not another word did he speak till we reached the house.

Mort laid the body down on the bed that Mandy showed him—her own little bed—and then he stood and looked at the corpse for a full minute without saying a word.

Brune had been murdered—choked to death. Her beautiful neck still bore the marks of the hands that had done it. I looked up at Mort again, and said:

"Mort, my dear boy, for Heaven's sake, come away!"

But Mort still stood there with his face as white as if there was not a drop of blood in it.

By and by he raised his hand slowly and said very distinctly—you could hear a pin drop in the room when the women and old man Waldorf were not sobbing:

"Who did this I don't know, but I swear that I will find him, and these hands shall kill him, or may they wither! So help me Heaven!"

And as he said it he looked full into the faces of the men with eyes that seemed to have burning devils in them.

"Great Heaven!" gasped Mark Smith, just behind me, and I turned around and saw him shaking as if he had a fit.

Then Mort fell down by Brune's bedside and kissed her, and called her his beautiful darling over and over again, till half the men in the room were crying.

Pretty soon Black Jim, a darky that worked around for the neighbors, went up to the table, close to the bed, and laid a handkerchief on it, and said softly:

"I found purty little Missy Brune's hangchef right under whar she was layin'."

John Poorman was standing by the table, and he called the darky back and talked to him. Then Poorman up and said, excited-like:

"Neighbors, Jim says he found this handkerchief on the ground underneath the body. It was not Miss Brune's; but the name on it is Mark Smith!"

I looked about for Mark Smith where he had stood but a minute before, but he was not there, and a man told me hurriedly that he had gone out of the door just as Black Jim laid the handkerchief on the table.

Then, looking about me, I saw in the faces of the men that which made me certain that the law stood very little chance of dealing with Mark Smith if they got their hands on him. And I knew my duty as sheriff, too—to protect the criminal, if he was caught, until he had a fair trial, no matter what my own feelings might be. And when I looked at my son as he passed by me, thrusting men out of his way as if they were mere babies, I knew what would be my chief obstacle. I swore in deputies, and the hunt for Brune Waldorf's murderer was commenced.

* * * * * * *

How Mark Smith managed to escape that night I don't know, for with a start of only about two minutes, and with three or four hundred men after him, he stood little chance of getting away. But get away he did, and although almost the whole county was looking for him, he was not seen nor heard of for three days. At the end of that time he came in after night and gave himself up, and demanded protection. He was nearly starved, having had nothing to eat but berries since the night of his escape, and a more pitiable-looking being I never saw. I got him under lock and key as soon as possible, and tried to keep quiet the fact of his being in jail.

The hunt for him went on for another day, and then it leaked out somehow, and word was sent to those who were searching for the murderer. I strengthened the guard at the jail, and made everything as secure as possible.

Mort had not been home since the night of the murder. I was dreadfully worried about him. Men told me that he had hardly slept a wink since that night, and was starving himself. I wanted to see him, and try to get him to let the law take its course, but he avoided me, and I failed.

Now I can talk pretty calmly about that night when the mob came, but I tell you, sir, when I saw those men coming I didn't feel half as comfortable as I do now. I went up into Smith's cell, and he had seen them, too, and there he was crouching in the corner, with his teeth chattering—the cur!

I didn't want to be sheriff at all just then—all my sympathy was with the crowd on the outside—but I knew my duty. I looked out at them, but I couldn't see Mort anywhere. Smith caught me around the legs and blubbered and whimpered like the poor, miserable coward that he was. I wonder yet how I could keep my hands off his throat.

All of a sudden they began to yell, and such a wild, blood-curdling yell I never heard before or since. I went down-stairs, and they were looking in the windows and howling for Smith, and after every howl I could hear a cry of terror from the stairway, for Smith's cell-door was right at the top of it. I have heard hungry wolves howl, sir, and when they were after me, too, but they never froze my blood like those fellows did when their fierce cries went up. They were crazy, sir—crazy for Smith's blood. There wasn't a real cool man among my deputies, either, but I knew they were all brave men.

I told my men to cock their guns, and to shoot if any one forced their way in. Just then we heard Mort's voice giving directions to bring some heavy timbers to batter down the door, and the men looked relieved, for they thought I would countermand the order. But though I felt that I would die to save my boy's life, I knew it wouldn't be right to take that order back.

I went to a window up-stairs and spoke to the mob, and begged them to go home and let the law take its course, but they only answered with another yell. Then I spoke to Mort—for I could see him now—and told him that it would be my duty to protect the prisoner even against my own flesh and blood, and that if he persisted he might have his father's blood on his hands. I thought that would move him, sir, but it didn't. He only said, stern-like:

"Give Smith to us, father, and not even a splinter in the jail-door will be harmed."

But I couldn't do it, and when I went down-stairs again one of the men asked:

"Does the order to shoot still stand, Mr. Wilder?"

"The order still stands," says I, feeling as if I were committing murder.

Crash! went a heavy beam against the door. The men took their places in the hall, with their guns covering the door. Crash! it came again, but the door held its own. My spirits began to rise. The mob struck the door three more blows without doing it much harm, and then they stopped for a while, and some of them left to get a heavier piece of timber.

All this time Smith was shrieking with terror up-stairs, while that pack of human wolves were howling on the outside.

Soon the assault on the door again commenced. This time the blows were heavier, and the door gave a little each time. The mob was still screeching like demons, and their excitement seemed to increase as they saw what progress they were making on the door. A few more heavy blows and the door was crushed in.

"The man who enters that door first will be shot!" I cried quickly, as the mob dropped their beam and prepared to rush in.

The sound of my voice was lost in the noise the mob made. The rush came almost immediately. The foremost one was Mort.

As the mob came on my deputies fired, and I saw Mort stagger, but only for a moment; then I saw him mounting the stairs. I was seized and bound, and in less time than it takes to tell it the mob was in possession of the jail.

The stairway was blocked for a moment by the swarm of men; then they cleared a way for Mort as he came down, bearing Smith in his arms. At the foot of the stairs he fell insensible from the loss of blood, and the mob, leaving one of my men, whom they had untied, to look after him, took the prisoner and bore him away.

The rest of the story is quickly told. Outside of the jail-yard stood a wagon, and they put the noose around Smith's neck, and some of the men got in the wagon and held the other end of the rope, while the driver kept the horses going at a rattling gait, so that Smith was obliged to run his hardest to keep from being choked on the way to the place where the hanging was to be done. The mob was pitiless. They hung him to a big tree in front of Dr. Davis' house, over there, but not before Smith confessed his guilt. Jealousy was the cause of his crime. Davis had the tree cut down the next day.

No, sir; Mort did not marry any one else. He is still true to little Brune. He is a good, brave man, and is sheriff now himself. But I tell you, sir, he never has been the same boy since that night.

THE NICK CARTER WEEKLY

ISSUED EVERY SATURDAY. BEAUTIFUL COLORED COVERS

No other detective stories are half as interesting as those that appear in this publication. Nick Carter has been all over the world and has had experience with all kinds of criminals.

That's why, boys, his adventures holds one's interest from cover to cover. There is no brutality in Nick's make-up—he does not need it—he uses his wits. Do not fail to get the latest numbers from your newsdealer.

PRICE FIVE CENTS PER COPY

For sale by all newsdealers, or sent, by the publishers to any address upon receipt of price in money or postage stamps

HERE ARE THE LATEST TITLES:

526—A Double Mystery; or, Nick Carter's Strong-hand Play.
527—Clarice, the Countess; or, Nick Carter's Motor-boat Chase.
528—Clarice, the Woman Detective; or, Nick Carter's Titled Assistant.
529—The Index of Seven Stars; or, Nick Carter Finds the Hidden City.
530—An Amazonian Queen; or, Nick Carter Becomes a Gladiator.
531—A Blackmailer's Paradise; or, Nick Carter Discovers the Hidden Hand.
532—Gipsy Madge, the Blackmailer; or, Nick Carter's First-class Bluff.
533—Facing an Unseen Terror; or, Nick Carter's Day of Blunders.
534—Idayah, the Woman of Mystery; or, Nick Carter's Fourfold Problem.
535—The Making of a King; or, Nick Carter Faces His Greatest Mystery.
536—The Empire of a Goddess; or, Nick Carter's Wonderful Adventure.
537—Zanabayah, the Terrible; or, Nick Carter's Struggle With the Vitic King.
538—The Seven-headed Monster; or, Nick Carter's Midnight Caller.
539—The Woman of the Mask; or, Nick Carter's Quadruple Mystery.
540—The Masked Woman's Daring Plot; or, Nick Carter Springs a Surprise.
541—Hobo Harry, the Beggar King; or, Nick Carter Downs the Yeggman.
542—Black Madge's Hobo Gang; or, Nick Carter and the Yeggman Queen.
543—Black Madge's Vengeance; or, Nick Carter's Crafty Foe.
544—A Tragedy of the Footlights; or, Nick Carter and the Temple of Vice.
545—The Maynard Woman's Double; or, Patsy's Terrific Brain Storm.
546—Three Against Fifteen; or, Patsy's Splendid Courage.
547—A Mystery of Two Passengers; or, Nick Carter Prevents a Great Crime.
548—A Dead Man at the Feast; or, Nick Carter's Very Slender Clue.
549—The House of Secrets; or, Nick Carter's Midnight Vigil.
550—The Lost Bank President; or, Nick Carter Takes a Great Big Chance.
551—Ralph Bolton's Double Plot; or, Nick Carter's Three Assistants at Work.
552—The Dare-devil Crook; or, Nick Carter Finds a Promising Clue.
553—A Mystery From the Klondyke; or, Nick Carter's Double-headed Case.
554—Returned From the Grave; or, Nick Carter's Legally Dead Client.
555—The Mystery Man of 7-Up Ranch; or, Nick Carter Against the "Brown Chet" Outfit.

If you want any back numbers of this publication and cannot procure them from your newsdealer, they can be obtained from this office direct. Postage stamps taken the same as money.

STREET & SMITH, Publishers, 79 Seventh Avenue, NEW YORK CITY.